3-30-2019

Who Am I Really?: Questioning the Patriarchal "Girl World" to Find Identity in Mean Girls, Heathers the Musical, and Carrie: The Musical

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105 Pages

Both musicals and stories about teenage girls are genres that tend to be overlooked by scholars, and to not receive serious analysis. Some scholars may dismiss these genres as being shallow and unworthy of scrutiny through a critical lens. However, much may be learned about patriarchal influence on teenage girls in musicals such as *Mean Girls, Heathers the Musical and Carrie: The Musical*. This thesis analyzes the patriarchal influence on the teen girl characters in these three musicals, using Girl Studies and feminist theory. This study applies arguments that state that patriarchal influence is what causes girls to form cliques, in order for them to feel powerful in a world that disenfranchises them, and applies it to these musicals. The cliques that arise inspire conformity, which causes a loss of individuality. Only when the teenage girls in *Mean Girls, Heathers,* and *Carrie* are able to break free from patriarchal expectations are they able to truly find their own identities.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchal Influence, Teen Girl, *Mean Girls, Carrie: The Musical, Heathers the Musical,* Teen Girl Musical, Musical Adaptation

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

School of Theatre and Dance

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank and acknowledge my committee members: Dr. Ann Haugo, Dr. Li Zeng and Dr. Kristin Carlson for their support and guidance through this process. Without them, I would probably be writing about something totally different, or not be writing at all. I also would like to thank my parents, Rachel and Eric Renner for their encouragement my whole life and pushing me to be the best that I can be. Without their support, I would not be in graduate school right now. Thanks to Professor Jeff Hendry from Rockford University, who let me pick his brain about *Carrie: The Musical* in the midst of his own chaotic life. And finally, I would like to thank my friends and support system who have kept me sane throughout this process: Kristen Conoley, my best friend and constant cheerleader; Brian Parker, who constantly dealt with my stress and continued to push me; Hope Morris for making grad school easier and telling me that my thesis was cool; and the rest of my own group of Plastics, who always made me laugh when I needed it the most.

M.R.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A friend recently saw *Mean Girls* on Broadway and said to me "I don't care if it makes me basic, I love *Mean Girls*!" My friend is not alone in this sentiment, as there has been extreme interest and love for the musical since it opened in 2018. The musical is based on the 2004 film of the same name, both with a script written by Tina Fey. The fact that my friend felt the need to defend her love of the musical despite her belief that it makes her "basic" is telling of the perceptions of this particular genre of musical. This genre is what I call the "teen girl musical," a musical which features teenage girls as the main characters, with a plot that centers on their lives and the problems that they face. There is very little written critically about this genre of musical, as many people see the stories of teenage girls as shallow and not worthy of proper critical analysis. However, the popularity of Tony Nominated *Mean Girls* shows us that this genre of musical has staying power, and perhaps it is time for scholars to start viewing these shows with the respect that they grant other performances. Loving a popular musical does not make one "basic." These shows are popular for a reason and liking things that other people like does not devalue their message.

The teen girl musical is a subset of the "teen musical" which has been wildly popular for as long as musicals have been popular. This includes musicals such as *West Side Story*, *Grease*, and *Spring Awakening.* The teen girl musical does not exclusively feature female characters, but it deals with issues that are pertinent to teenage girls, such as popularity, dating, and the effects of a patriarchal society on the teenage girls' psyche. *Mean Girls* is of course part of this genre, as are *Heathers the Musical*, *Bring it On: The Musical*, *Clueless, the Musical*, and *Carrie: The Musical.* What qualifies these musicals to be a part of this genre is that they all center on teenage girls as the main characters, take place largely in the high school, and grapple with the issues I

listed above. For the purpose of my thesis, I will be focusing on *Mean Girls, Heathers the Musical,* and *Carrie: The Musical.* The reason that I have chosen these three musicals is because of their popularity, similarities in content, and the dark tones that they take on. I believe that these three shows in particular showcase the effects of the patriarchy on the teenage girl and the role this plays in social hierarchies and power.

While *Mean Girls, Heathers,* and *Carrie* all deal heavily with power dynamics within the high school, the way that they approach the topic is extremely different. *Mean Girls* is a lighthearted partly satirical comedy, which though very light in its subject and material, still conveys strong messages about what it means to be a teenage girl and the consequences that come with bullying and vying for power. *Heathers* also ends happily: however, it is a black comedy. It deals with heavy subject matter such as suicide and death in a sometimes too cheerful manner. In *Heathers,* being popular can mean life or death. *Carrie* takes this idea to the extreme, as it belongs to the horror genre. Though there are moments of comedy, it is meant to be taken seriously and make the audience critically look at the effects of bullying on a young woman. There is only one survivor at the end of this musical, and she is the one who fights against what society expects of her. Juxtaposing these three musicals allows for a deeper understanding of the themes of the teen girl musical, as they contain the same anti-patriarchy message but deal with it in vastly different manners.

In my thesis, I will argue that teenage girls are victims of the Western patriarchal society in which they live, which sets forth for them rules about how they should act and behave-namely, that they should behave in a "feminine" manner. When I use the term femininity, unless stated otherwise, the definition I am working with is from the *Salem Encyclopedia of Health,* which defines femininity as: "The qualities, formed by cultural and historical changes, perceived as

feminine ideals to which all women at a specific time and place should aspire" ("Femininity as Cultural Construct"). I will also be using Raewyn W. Connell's concept of emphasized femininity, which argues "It is the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential basis for differentiation" (183). Connell's concept of emphasized femininity is informed by the idea that in a male dominated society, other genders are constructed with the intention to accommodate men's desires.

The characters that I analyze are all victims of their culture and society, and as these three musicals take place in the United States, this culture is a Western patriarchal one. This culture has set up ideals about what it means to be a woman and what it means to be feminine, and these ideals have developed within a system of male dominance. Teenage girls take in these cultural images and interpret how they are supposed to act and acting properly is crucial in the judgmental world of the high school. These feminine qualities are what serve as capital to these teenage girls, and these qualities determine whether they are popular or not, which determines how powerful they are.

The main works I will be using to argue my points are Nicole E.R. Landry's work *The Mean Girl Motive: Negotiating Power and Femininity* and Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen Bees & Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World,* on which *Mean Girls* is based. Landry's book is a study on teenage girls, done through interviews, in which she attempts to discover why girls are mean to each other. She concludes that the reason girls are mean is to maintain their power, which they get through being popular, a status they get from being feminine. Landry found a connection between meanness, popularity, power, and femininity, and thus her work is extremely important in understanding the female characters in these musicals. Wiseman's work is the basis for *Mean Girls,* but it also

offers many insights into the motivations of teenage girls and a guide to understanding them. A term Wiseman often uses and which I will also utilize is “Girl World,” which Wiseman defines as “The unwritten rules that often guide girls’ behavior...It’s also giving you rules about what you shouldn’t be, what you can’t be...no one ever sits down and says this to you that these are the rules, this is Girl World” (“Defining Girl World…”). These two books work in tandem, with Wiseman explaining how teen girls act and Landry explaining why they act this way.

Because of my emphasis on these teenage girls and their role in society, I am using Girl Studies and feminist theory, specifically materialist feminism, to look at these characters. The works that I employ are *Girls in Power: Gender, Body, and Menstruation in Adolescence* by Laura Fingerson, *Girl Studies* by Elline Lipkin, *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity* edited by Anita Harris, and *Understanding Teenage Girls: Culture, Identity, and Schooling* by Horace R. Hall with Andrew Brown-Thirston. These books offer different perspectives to understanding girls and the world that they are brought up in, perspectives which have shaped my arguments about the girl characters in these musicals. This provides a framework for me to start my analysis, setting the groundwork for the background of the world that these girls live in. To be able to understand the characters that I am analyzing, I first must be able to understand the world that they belong to. Being a woman myself, and having grown up in the Western world, I have my own basic understanding about this world. However, I do not have the psychological background to be able to fully understand the reasons behind and conditions of Girl World. Because of this, these books are extremely helpful to me in understanding where these girls are coming from, from clothing choices to menstruation to sexuality.

Since all three of these musicals are based on previous works, there is literature about them, some of which I will be interacting with. The difference between these previous iterations

and the ones that I am analyzing is of course, that I am analyzing the stage musical versions of them. The reason that I am interested in the musical versions specifically are both their popularity and what they are able to reveal about characters through music. The defining elements of the musical are the music and lyrics, which serve as insights to the characters thoughts and emotions. In his 2006 book, *The Musical as Drama: A Study of the Principles and Conventions behind Musical Shows from Kern to Sondheim,* Scott McMillin explains "The effect of breaking into song (or dance) is to double the characters into a second order of time, the lyric time of music, so that they gain a formality of expression unavailable to them in the book" (20). McMillin is arguing that what makes musicals have such strong characterization is not the fact that the songs are integrated into the book, but the fact that the songs are *different* than the book. Therefore, there are two different levels of narrative, which double the characters into both book and musical versions. The duality of these characters expands them and allows for two levels of analysis. Because I am primarily interested in character analysis, this duality of meaning is extremely important in understanding the characters. The musical allows for the characters to exist both through words and through music, giving them a complexity they would not have otherwise.

The feminist approach that I am taking to these musicals focuses on the idea that these characters exist in a patriarchal world. When I refer to the patriarchy or the patriarchal world, what I mean by this is a world where the male gender is the dominant gender, who have power over women and influence the society and culture around them. The two books which have shaped my views of this Western patriarchal society are *The Creation of Patriarchy* by Gerda Lerner and *Patriarchal Attitudes* by Eva Figes. Lerner offers a comprehensive history of patriarchal societies and how and why they came to be, offering an understanding of why our

world is the way that it is. Figes book is more specifically about the history of women in the patriarchal world, and how the attitudes of this world affect women in society. These two books offer an understanding and a framework through which the worlds of these musicals can be understood.

Through this feminist analysis, I am also working with the idea of "femininity" as a societal construct that comes from this patriarchal society, which outlines a set of characteristics supposedly predetermined by "female" sexual organs. The performance of "femininity" is tied into power dynamics and this is especially true of high school students. There is a hierarchy within the Western high school, and how a young girl expresses her femininity can have a direct impact on where that student lands on the social hierarchy. Using material feminist theory, these terms can better be understood in relation to the patriarchy and power structures that color the world of the teenage characters and how these power structures trickle down into the high school setting. I am also focusing solely on female characters within these musicals. Though there are several male characters who are worthy of their own analysis, my main concern is with the experience of the teenage girl specifically and how the patriarchal culture in which she lives has a direct effect on the power structures in the high school. Teenage boys are a part of the patriarchy because of their expressed gender, so they do not have to follow the same rules and guidelines as the girl students, and thus are exempt from my particular analysis.

Stacy Wolf's *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* discusses the depiction and history of women on the Broadway stage. Her feminist history of the Broadway musical is useful in offering a framework for analyzing musicals through a feminist lens. This includes looking at the historical context in which these musicals exist, and how that specific time period influences the characterizations. The shows that I am analyzing are unique

in that their historical contexts are complicated. *Mean Girls* is based on a 2004 film but takes place in the modern day, *Heathers* is based on a 1989 film and takes place in the same time but was written in the 2010s, and *Carrie* is based on a novel and film written in the 1970s, was originally made for the stage in the 1980s and then rewritten in the 2010s. These unique time periods give the stories unique feminist perspectives which can be analyzed both in the context of when they were originally written and when they actually take place. Another point that Wolf analyzes in her book is the relationship between female characters and the queer undertones that are at play in these relationships. This queer relationship can be seen in nearly all the relationships in these three musicals, and though not something that I will explore in depth, is still a factor worth considering when analyzing the teen girl musical.

As I mentioned before, there is very little written critically about teen girls' stories, let alone anything about these particular musicals. However, there are a few works that discuss the original film iterations of these stories, and in the case of *Carrie,* the novel. John Ross Bowie and Roz Kaveney have both written on *Heathers* critically in *Heathers* and *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from Heathers to Veronica Mars,* respectively. Kaveney also discusses *Mean Girls* in her book. These two books discuss the film versions and offer some insight into character analysis and understanding the relationships of characters. When it comes to *Carrie,* there is far more written. Both the novel and film versions of *Carrie* have received considerable analysis. Barbara Creed includes a chapter on *Carrie* in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis,* which insightfully equates Carrie's supernatural abilities and her power and her menstruation. Victoria Madden also writes about the novel version of *Carrie* in "'We Found the Witch, May We Burn Her?' Suburban Gothic, Witch-Hunting, and Anxiety-Induced Conformity in Stephen King's *Carrie.*" Her analysis of the female characters and their

participation in group bullying as a means of fitting in is apt and applicable to the musical. One author who mentions the musical iteration is Douglas Keesey in his essay "Patriarchal Mediations of *Carrie*: The Book, the Movie, and the Musical." While Keesey has strong character analyses, he offers little critical analysis of the musical. He is also writing about the version of the musical from 1988, and I am focusing on the reworked 2012 version. So, his specific insights into that performance are not helpful to me as the complaints he lodges against the musical are not relevant to the work that I am doing.

Through the analysis and comparison of these three musicals, I am hoping to fill a gap in the literature. While there is literature written about their film iterations, and the novel in the case of *Carrie*, there is very little to nothing written critically about the musical versions. Since the musical versions offer double characterizations of the characters, they are worthy of their own separate analyses, which includes both the book and the music. In addition to offering analyses on three musicals which have little to nothing written on them, I show that the story of the teen girl is something that is worthy of critical analysis. Both musicals and stories about teenage girls are often written off as being vapid or superficial. However, musicals have a lot to offer viewers in terms of understanding character and thus the world of the character.

The musicals that I am choosing to analyze illustrate that a teenager's power and status in high school is directly tied into their perceived femininity or lack thereof. Female characters are more powerful and hold a higher status the more feminine they are. The idea of femininity as a cultural construct is something that has been of greater interest as of late, with many people questioning the status quo about what it means to be masculine or feminine and where these definitions come from. Analyzing the effects of a patriarchal society on young girls is a relevant

theme to be explored and allows for a deeper understanding of why teenage girls act the way that they do.

For this study, I will be focusing on the book and the music of each show, rather than live performances and dance. Each show has a professionally released soundtrack, which is what I will be using when looking specifically at vocal performance. If ever I need to bring live performance, aesthetics of character, or dance into my analysis, I will be using images and clips from the original productions and casts of these shows, through clips available through *Playbill* or on *YouTube*. I will be using the 2018 Broadway version of *Mean Girls*, the 2015 off-Broadway production of *Heathers* and the 2012 off-Broadway revival of *Carrie* (though *Carrie* was originally written for the stage in 1988, I will be working with the more well-known and well-received reworking). I will be referencing these versions, as these are the ones that an audience is most familiar with, are the most influential on any regional productions, and are the productions that have the most information available about them. The reason for focusing on the book and lyrics rather than performance is to show that there is merit in the language of the musical theatre, and that this language is cause for its own serious analysis.

My personal interest in the topic comes from several different places. Having always been a lover and a scholar of both film and theatre, the intersection of these art forms is always of interest to me. All three musicals that I am working with are adaptations of films (and in the case of *Carrie*, a novel) and I find these particular musical adaptations fascinating. Both musicals and the teen girl genre allow for heightened emotions, making these films the perfect subjects for adapting to the stage, and is the reason why there are many more so-called "chick flicks" in the works to be adapted into musicals. I have always been a fan of the film versions of *Mean Girls* and *Heathers*, and only recently discovered the story of *Carrie*, but was instantly drawn to it. I

have always been an anti-bullying advocate and the way in which these three stories deal with bullying is vastly different and yet frighteningly similar. Also as a lover of both musicals and stories about teen girls, it has always bothered me that these two genres lack the critical appreciation and attention that are given to straight plays and other films. These stories are all worthy of critical analysis, and through this study, I hope to show the worth in looking critically at that which is often considered superficial.

Chapter 1 of my thesis will serve as an analysis of *Mean Girls.* I start with this chapter as it is the musical which has the least extreme consequences for the characters who bully. In this chapter I will specifically look at the characters Cady Heron, Janis Sarkisian, Regina George, Gretchen Wieners, and Karen Smith. Each character will be analyzed using Wiseman and Landry's works to show their roles within the high school, why they have these roles, and how these roles affect their lives and personalities. Each of these characters will be analyzed in terms of the way they describe themselves and the way that other people describe them. This will be done using both the content and lines of the book along with the lyrics of the songs that the characters sing. Each of these characters are given solo songs, and these songs will be looked at in terms of what they reveal about the inner world of the characters. Using Landry and Wiseman's framework, the effects of patriarchy on these characters will be analyzed. These effects impact these girls' actions and why they act the way they do. The theme and the message about self-acceptance will also be explained, and how this importance of personal identity ties into the larger theme of patriarchal influence. The chapter will conclude with how these characters are able to break free from patriarchal ideals about how they must act and the fates of these characters in the end.

Chapter 2 will explore similar topics within *Heathers the Musical*, such as the effects of patriarchy and the influence of the clique. This is the second chapter as it has extreme consequences for its mean characters, yet not the most extreme in this study. This chapter includes analyses of the teenage girl characters, including Veronica Sawyer, Heather Chandler, Heather Duke, and Heather McNamara. These are characters who receive double characterization through the book and music. The songs these characters sing reveal their beliefs about where they fall in the school's hierarchy and their inner thoughts and feelings. The adults in *Heathers* are marginal, and for this reason they will not be figured into the analysis of the musical or the characters. The characters' femininity and the value that they place on themselves and others because of their perceived ideals about what are and are not acceptable expressions of femininity will be analyzed. The dark tone of the piece will be analyzed in terms of how it compares to *Mean Girls* in portraying the same themes. The ideas of death, resurrection, and redemption will be explored in regards to the musical's use of murder and suicide. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an explanation for the survival of the characters who are able to live, and why they are able to live and break free from their patriarchal constraints.

Chapter 3 will serve as an analysis of *Carrie: The Musical*. This is the final chapter, and the one with the most severe ramifications for its characters. I will be doing an analysis of three major characters including the titular Carrie White, Chris Hargensen, and Sue Snell. These characters are chosen because of the emphasis they are given in the musical, specifically by the double characterization given to them by the use of songs. All these characters perform songs that reveal something about their character, whether that be their emotions, intentions, or thoughts about the world. I am also focusing on the teenage characters and not characters like Margaret or Miss Gardner, though their influence will be analyzed. Because the songs are the

reason that this double characterization exists, the characters will be analyzed not only through their words in the book but also their words and voice through song. Each character represents a different role that Wiseman outlines in her book, and the importance of power to these characters will be explored. Carrie's telekinetic powers will be given attention, and their relationship to her femininity will be given importance. The patriarchal world that these girls live in will be explained and connected to their experiences and personalities. Finally, I will look at the serious tone of the show and its horrific elements and how they influence the reception of the themes of identity, power, and patriarchy.

In the conclusion, I will be comparing these three musicals more closely and explaining more deeply why I believe these three musicals to be in conversation with each other. Their similarities in characters, songs, and themes will be the main three things explored, along with the way that they handle patriarchal influence on their characters. The juxtaposition of these thematically similar but tonally different teen musicals will allow for an analysis of the different perspectives offered to the themes of personal identity, power, and patriarchal influence in the high school. I will also go more into depth on these three musicals specifically, why they were chosen over other options and why I believe they are so popular and speak so well to their audience.

The teenage girl is worthy of critical study, and her story should not be one that is thrown away as being too "basic," "superficial," or "vapid." The characters in these musicals are ones with depth, who are as worthy of analysis as Medea or Antigone or Nora Helmer are. Just because they are younger or put importance on things that many people do not take seriously does not mean that they should not be given serious consideration. Studying teenage girls can reveal insights into the world that the youth today are growing up in, and reveal the shocking and

painful influence of the patriarchal world that these girls, and the audience of these shows, live in. So what if liking *Mean Girls* makes people think you're basic? There are worse things to be, like dead. And as you will soon see, death is a real consequence in Girl World.

CHAPTER II: THINK PINK: FIGHTING ARTIFICIALITY TO FIND REALITY IN *MEAN GIRLS*

Introduction

In April 2018, in his review of the new musical *Mean Girls,* Rex Reed of *The Observer* wrote "*Mean Girls* is a load of teenybopper trash, which, like the recycled jokes and vapid, lukewarm Jeff Richmond-Nell Benjamin pop score, cannot really be appreciated by anyone without a mouthful of bubble gum." While Reed is entitled to his own opinion, his dismissal of the musical as "teenybopper trash" and "vapid" misses the point of the musical as a statement on the autonomy of teenage girls, and instead automatically labels it as meaningless. This dismissal of stories about adolescent girls is a product of the patriarchal society Reed lives in, which enforces the idea that girls' stories lack depth or meaning. The musical, based on the 2004 film of the same name, was written by Tina Fey and is an updated and modern-day version of her own screenplay. Using Rosalind Wiseman's parenting guide, *Queen Bees & Wannabees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World,* Fey wrote a story which tries to capture the experience of the teenage girl. Reed may not see any weight in the musical, but for the teenage girls who have flocked to the theatre to see this Tony Award-nominated musical, experiencing *Mean Girls* allows these girls to see themselves on the stage, presented as flawed, growing beings. In addition to representation, audience members also get lessons on acceptance, power, bullying, and finding individuality in a patriarchal world which pushes conformity.

Mean Girls follows Cady Heron, a new arrival at North Shore High School. Cady has been living in Kenya, and when her parents move to America, she starts attending public school,

having been homeschooled. Cady quickly makes friends with Damian and Janis, two social outcasts at North Shore. Soon Cady catches the eye of Regina George and The Plastics, the most popular girls in school. Janis believes that it will be a fun idea for Cady to pretend to be friends with them and then report the things that they say to her and Damian. Once Regina steals Aaron (Cady's crush), Cady, Damian, and Janis decide to get revenge against Regina and ruin her popularity. Along the way, Cady becomes the new leader of The Plastics, forgetting herself in order to fit in and be popular. Regina attempts to get revenge on Cady for taking everything from her by initiating a massive fight amongst all the junior-year girls and implicating Cady as the cause of it. Janis soon reveals in front of their class that she and Cady purposefully ruined Regina's life. Regina yells at Cady and rages out of the school, which leads to her being hit by a bus and getting injured. Cady is suspended and while doing some reflecting, she realizes that being shallow and mean to other girls never got her anything worth keeping.

The ultimate message of *Mean Girls* is that being nice is far easier and better than being mean. Reed's review is offensive because he does not attempt to understand what the musical is saying and fails to see the critique of these mean girls that Fey and company are making. While the musical is a light-hearted comedy with a happy ending, the moral of the story, that insulting other girls will not make one feel better about oneself, is an important lesson for not only teenage girls to learn, but also for everyone. The characters in *Mean Girls* are not simply one-dimensional caricatures of teenagers, but multi-dimensional, individual characters who have their own thoughts and feelings. The feelings of these characters can be analyzed as they exist in the context of the modern Western world, under patriarchal influence. These girls are mean to each other because they are trying to find their own power in a world which disenfranchises them. For these girls, power lies in popularity and climbing up the social ladder.

In *Girl Studies*, Elline Lipkin explains, "Some researchers have likened girls' jockeying for power within social cliques as a way to fulfill an otherwise unfulfillable desire for power...society does value popularity and social success in girls" (106). These adolescent girls have no other means to power in a world that privileges men, so the only way they can feel powerful is to be popular in the high school. Getting and maintaining this popularity is difficult, and often involves bullying and conforming to the standard ideas of femininity and girlhood. The characters in the musical may be partially "vapid" as Reed states, but the musical itself is not. The value these characters place in seemingly vapid interests is as a result of their society and their search for power, a criticism which the musical is taking on. In order for the teenage girl to feel powerful, she enacts stereotypical femininity to become popular. Through this popularity, she loses her individuality as she attempts to conform, and the only way that she is able to find her identity again is by breaking free from constraints of patriarchal expectations.

Cady Heron: Home-Schooled Jungle Freak

Cady Heron, the protagonist in *Mean Girls*, is one of these girls who must break from patriarchal constraints. She is easily swayed by the influence of The Plastics, and loses her individuality when she arrives at North Shore. At the start of the musical, Cady does not live by the rules of Girl World or buy into the same ideals about power in this public school. Because she has been homeschooled her whole life and lived in the savanna, she has not been socialized in the same way that the other characters have. She has not had the same Western high school experience as her peers. She does share similar desires, however. At the beginning of the musical, while still in Kenya, she expresses her desire to have and to be something more than she

is. In Cady's first solo song, "It Roars," she sings, "Do you ever get a feeling everybody else is happy, everybody else has friends, and they're better friends than yours?" Even though Cady has been homeschooled on a different continent, she still has the same feelings that Western public-school girls have: the desire to be happy and have good friends. Cady expresses how she is looking for something more, which is important in her journey once she gets to North Shore because it shows her vulnerability. Cady is more vulnerable than other characters, both because she is experiencing something new, in attending public school for the first time in the United States, making her naïve to the ways of the other female characters, and because she has high hopes. Cady's high hopes make her more vulnerable to be let down and more susceptible to corruptive influences.

Cady is susceptible to these influences because she is in a whole new world. Cady's naïveté to the ways of Girl World forces her to look at this world in the only way she knows how: as a savanna full of wild animals. At first when she arrives at North Shore, Cady tries to fit in, singing in "It Roars:" "I've got to fight for the right to belong and fit in." Cady is viewing everything as a sort of contest which she must fight in order to belong, taking the lessons she learned in the wild to school with her. These lessons cause her to look at her surroundings in a different way. In *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Films and Television from* Heathers *to* Veronica Mars, Roz Kaveney writes that the story of *Mean Girls,* "Brings a naïve protagonist into the thick of high school and has her explore her new milieu as if she were an anthropologist" (99). Cady is interested in the culture of these public-school girls, studying their characteristics like she would have done with the animals back in Africa.

What Cady finds after analyzing their culture is that these girl animals are not very friendly. Cady has a hard time making friends the way she wanted to when starting school,

resulting in her eating her lunch alone in a toilet stall. It is in the bathroom while she is in the stall that she meets Janis and Damian, who serve as her first friends and tour guides of the school. Cady has still to find her own identity in the school, something she is not given the chance to find as soon as she meets Janis and Damian. When Janis calls Cady by her name pronounced as "caddy," Cady corrects her; "It's Cady" to which Janis responds: "Yeah I'm gonna call you Caddy." Janis is already stripping Cady of her identity by giving her a new name, and not respecting who Cady really is. Cady plays along with this because she wants to have friends and she wants to belong. She sees that Janis and Damian are the first people to show her any form kindness and she does not want to give that up.

Since Janis and Damian are the first people to show her kindness, Cady eagerly listens as they tell her about North Shore. Shortly after meeting in the bathroom, Damian sings the song "Where Do You Belong?," which emphasizes the importance of fitting in. Damian attempts to help Cady by outlining the different cliques that exist within the school and insisting that there is one place in particular where she belongs. He tells her "You'll be judged on sight and made to fit, so find a clique and stick with it." Damian explains that belonging to a group is an inevitability in the high school, so Cady may as well find a group to belong to. He does not state that this must be a group that she likes or gets along with, just a group to fit in with because she does not have any other options. Damian does not seem to question that everyone gets "a box and that's where we go," because this is just the way that things are. Damian even tells Cady "You'll be judged on sight, voted in or out, 'cause that's what high school's all about." He understands that high school is about being judged and being popular. Though Damian is aware that everyone is judged and made to fit in, he does not have any desire to change this.

After insisting that Cady find where she belongs and informing her that she will be made to fit whether she likes it or not, Damian and Janis explain The Plastics to Cady. These are the girls who are popular because of their beauty, looks, and the fear that they instill in the other students. They are called The Plastics because they are "Shiny, fake, and hard." The group consists of Regina George, Gretchen Wieners, and Karen Smith. Cady passes by The Plastics' table at lunch, and they invite her to sit with them and tell her that she belongs with them. Cady does not argue with this, and rather eats with them and enjoys the thrill that comes along with being a part of the popular clique. Though Janis and Damian have been real friends to her, being with The Plastics is what makes Cady feel powerful.

Cady feels powerful with The Plastics because being with them puts Cady at the top of the high school hierarchy, and this is the best place a teenage girl can be. In *The Mean Girl Motive: Negotiating Power and Femininity,* after conducting interviews with girls, Nicole E.R Landry concluded, "Popularity implies power, meaning that the girls perceived popularity as an exclusive means of power for girls" (65). Since Cady is hanging out with The Plastics, the other girls in the school perceive her as being powerful. Cady has just arrived, and yet she is at the top of the social hierarchy. She is popular and therefore she is powerful, possessing the social position that these other girls are striving for. They strive for this because they see it as their only way to have a semblance of power in their lives. Cady has quickly picked up on this and learned that in Girl World, being popular is more important than having friends, and being at the top of the hierarchy is the most powerful position that she can have.

Cady explains how exciting this position at the top of the hierarchy is in "Apex Predator" in which she describes Regina as the "apex predator," or the predator who is at the top of the food chain. Regina is at the very top of the social hierarchy at North Shore. She controls all of

those around her and gets whatever she wants. Singing about Regina, Cady explains “Though Janis is great, she does not have this power. People literally cower, Janis can’t do that.” Cady admits outright that she loves the power that comes attached to being with Regina. Janis is a good friend to her, but Janis is lower on the food chain, and cannot control those around her the way that Regina can. Cady has always wanted to have friends and be happy, and everything about being with Regina is telling her that The Plastics are the most important friends that she can have and that being popular means being happy.

This happiness that comes with being popular does come with a price. While hanging out with The Plastics, Cady starts to change a lot of things about herself. The patriarchal society in which she lives tells her that to be more powerful she must be more feminine, meaning she must live up to the ideals of what it means to be a woman. Landry explains, “Femininity is powerful social capital for girls,” so the girls who are the most powerful are also the most stereotypically feminine (14). For Cady, following the rules of stereotypical femininity means changing her hair and wearing pink, short skirts, and heels. Cady must change herself in order to fit in, which though it starts on the outside, soon also extends to the inside. Because she learns to value others for what they are on the outside, she stops caring as much about what is on the inside, which is what causes her to become a “mean girl.”

One of the meanest things that Cady does is try to destroy Regina’s life. Cady decides to get revenge against Regina when she sees Regina kissing Aaron, the boy that Cady likes. Regina has kissed Aaron because she knows that Cady likes him and by showing that she has control over Aaron, Regina is showing Cady that she is the alpha female. This competition over a boy is particularly prevalent among women. Lipkin explains “[Girls] also learn that their own role within a patriarchal culture is to be of value to boys, and later men, and participating in this

assigned part can mean breaking close ties to girls" (102). The competition over Aaron ruins the relationship between Regina and Cady. By showing Cady that she can get Aaron whenever she wants, Regina is showing Cady that she is the one with power in this school and that she is more valuable because she is the one that Aaron desires.

This betrayal by Regina causes Cady, Janis and Damian to attempt to strip Regina of her power. They intend to do this by stripping her of her friends, her boyfriend, and her beauty. Because Regina is seen as an evil character, Cady, Janis, and Damian believe that being mean to her is justified. They do not think that what they are about to do to Regina is any worse than the things that Regina has done to other people, making them also mean girls in the process.

Cady, Janis, and Damian outline what they are about to do to Regina in the song "Revenge Party." After explaining their plans to strip Regina of what makes her powerful, Cady claims "I end up with Aaron when she's gone." Cady does have feelings for Aaron, but he serves as more of a pawn in their revenge plan, and also an emblem of power. Having a boyfriend means power in the high school, and if Cady obtains Aaron as a boyfriend, she can cement her popularity by having THE boyfriend, the ex of the most powerful girl in school. The ability to get male attention is something that will showcase Cady's power. Lipkin argues "[Girls'] greatest means of power lies in an ability to capture and retain male attention through feminine performances that play on sexual appeal" (28). By capturing Aaron, Cady will be able to ruin Regina's relationship and boost her own popularity, thus boosting her power. She will also be able to prove her value within the school, as she will have public confirmation that she is desired by a male.

In her attempts to be desired by Aaron, Cady continues to lose her own identity. Cady starts acting as if she is bad at math so that he starts tutoring her, though Cady is actually skilled

at math. Cady thinks that Aaron will only like her if she completely changes herself. She believes that only when she is stupid and externally beautiful will he really notice her. This agrees with Lipkin's argument that a girl must put on a feminine performance to capture male attention.

Cady's feminine performance becomes clear when she finally gets Aaron alone at a house party she is throwing and sings the song "More is Better." She explains to Aaron that her life is better now than it was in Kenya because she has more things, such as "more shoes." Now that Cady has been exposed to Western culture, she thinks that because she has more material objects, that she is somehow more valuable as a person. By having more things, Cady becomes more popular, more mythic, in the eyes of her peers. Because popularity is seen as the ultimate goal, Cady thinks that she has it all. However, she has not been evaluating what is actually important to her, but what those around her value as being important. Cady only thinks that having more shoes makes her better because the patriarchal society in which she lives tells teenage girls that they are valued by what they can buy. This value in consumerism is explained by Landry: "A girl's status among other girls is highly contingent on her ability to consume and perform the versions of femininity as contained within these scripts" (28). Cady's status depends on her ability to not only consume, but consume in a feminine way. Because she has more material possessions such as shoes, when other girls see Cady they envy her. This envy fuels Cady's fame within the school, and Cady does not want to give this up. Everything is telling her that to have more is to be better.

The only person who disputes this notion that more is always better is Aaron. Though Aaron is a character who serves more as a catalyst to the story than anything else, he is the one who tells Cady that more things does not necessarily make her better than anyone else. In her bedroom while Cady is telling Aaron that she believes that she is better than she was before

because she has more, Aaron tells her, “Looking at this place, I see you trying to erase what is best about yourself just to belong.” Aaron is drawing attention to the fact that in places where belonging and fitting in are valued, such as the high school, there is no room for individuality. He is calling Cady out for forgetting who she really is so that she can be a Plastic. He tells her that the things that once made her interesting are the things that she is changing about herself in order to fit in.

Cady is erasing her true self in order to conform. This conformity leads to her popularity, and Cady gets drunk with power. This makes her isolate herself from her true friends and from her true self. Cady also denies that she has become plastic, telling Janis in “Someone Gets Hurt (Reprise)” that it is Janis’ fault that she is the way that she is. Cady is so absorbed in the world of popularity that she cannot see things the way that they really are. She is so consumed with her new desire to be popular that she has forgotten her original goal, which was trying to find good friends and to be happy.

Though she has gotten off-track, this goal of being happy is not completely lost. After talking to Aaron, getting called out for being plastic by Janis, and seeing Regina get hit by a bus, Cady starts trying to redeem herself and right the wrongs she believes that she has caused to those around her. She tells the principal that she is responsible for writing The Burn Book, the book full of insults about the junior girls. In reality, the book was written by Regina, Gretchen, and Karen, and spread around the school by Regina. Cady knows this, but decides to take the blame anyway to try to make things right with Regina. Cady’s punishment for owning up to writing The Burn Book is having to compete in the Mathletes competition, a group that she was once told was “social suicide” to join.

On her path to redemption, and by participating in the Mathlete competition, Cady makes some realizations that she did not see before. In “Do This Thing,” Cady reignites her passion for math by taking a part in the contest. She sings “I’m no plastic, I’m no bitch. I’m a lean mean math machine on a mission.” Cady is finally realizing that she is more than what other people think of her and what she has pretended to be. She finally believes that following her passions and doing what she is interested in is cooler than trying to fit in and be something she is not.

Now that Cady realizes that there is more value in being her own person than being just like everyone else and can see other girls as individuals who are deserving of kindness, she is able to win the math competition. In *The Creation of Patriarchy* Gerda Lerner observes that to step outside of patriarchal thought “Means developing intellectual courage, the courage to stand alone, the courage to reach farther than our grasp, the courage to risk failure” (228). Cady steps outside of patriarchal expectations of her gender when she is courageous enough to risk failure in this competition. She uses her intelligence to step outside the patriarchal thought that being good at math is not something meant for feminine girls. Only when she steps away from the clique is she able to find her individuality and change herself.

After finding her own individuality, Cady shares the idea of acceptance with the other girls at the school when she is crowned queen at the Spring Fling dance. When she gets the plastic crown, she sings “I See Stars,” the final song in the musical. With her platform as queen, Cady uses the opportunity to explain to the girls that there is more to life than being “plastic” and fake. She tells them, “Plastic don’t shine, glitter don’t shine, rhinestones don’t shine the way you do. You are so real, you are so rare, I see you there.” Cady tells her classmates that they are stars in their own way. Pretending to be anything but themselves does not make them shine. Things like plastic, glitter, and rhinestones are material possessions that mean nothing in the long term.

These things exist in abundance, but it is stars that are rare, and all these girls are stars. She wants to share this message that individuality is worth more than fitting in and being just like everyone else.

By ending with this musical number and the notion that individuality is of value, the future of the characters is left uncertain. Despite this uncertainty, there is a positive feeling in the air. This optimism is perhaps why Reed believes the musical to be "teenybopper trash," a sentiment shared by Kaveney who believes that the story is "Hardly profound or subversive" (107). Everything does end up tied in a nice little bow, but a lot of people go to the theatre in order to be uplifted. It may end happily, but it also carries a strong message, which is that girls are more than what they consume and how they appear, and that they could be stars who shine on their own. A story does not have to be deeply "profound" or "subversive" in order to carry a strong message. The message is clear, and the audience can interpret that these students now have a different outlook on how they view each other and popularity.

Janis Sarkisian: What's True is Being Me

Cady's journey to this different outlook was one that required her to reach rock bottom before she realized that she shined on her own. One character who did not require such a drastic journey to realize this was Janis. From the beginning, Janis is presented as a feminist character who does not buy into the same things that the other girls at their school do. She is an artist, who does not wear the short skirts and pink clothing that The Plastics are known to wear. When she and Damian are warning audiences about what happens when you try to fit in during "Cautionary Tale," Janis sings "You can't buy integrity at the mall, it's not for sale." By singing this line,

Janis is already setting herself apart from the other girls at her school like The Plastics, who place value on material goods. Janis is explaining that personality attributes such as integrity are more important than going to the mall and going shopping.

In addition to not partaking in typically feminine activities, Janis is also set apart by her name. Originally named Janis Ian in Tina Fey's screenplay, her surname is changed to Sarkisian for the musical. Both these names carry meaning. Janis Ian is also the name of a folk singer who was popular in the 1970s and is known for her song "At Seventeen." The lyrics to this song are reflective of Janis' experiences and beliefs of her high school. Some of the lyrics read "Remember those who win the game lose the love they sought to gain, in debenture of quality and dubious integrity." While Ian is singing about romantic love amongst high school girls and boys, this can also be read as popular girls who lose the love of their "friends" and the other students at the school whose praise they desire because these relationships are lacking the foundations of basic quality and integrity. These are shallow relationships and these girls lose in the end because the love they have gained was never real to begin with.

While there are no obvious reasons to change her last name from Ian to Sarkisian for the musical, there are possible implications for why this has happened. The main implication is that Sarkisian is an Armenian surname, which then makes Janis a minority, and Others her even further. Not only is Janis a minority in her school by being someone who does not fit in, but she is also a racial minority. Another reason this name change is significant is because Sarkisian is the real last name of popstar Cher. Janis' name has been changed from that of one musician to another. Being named after Cher is significant because Cher is a gay and feminist icon. Janis' best friend is a gay man, and she serves as his ally throughout the course of the musical. Cher is also known for her music about dark outsiders, just like Janis.

Though Janis is the dark outsider in her school, she immediately makes Cady feel at home. She welcomes Cady without judgement, and she and Damian encourage Cady to eat with them at lunch and be a part of their group. Janis shows some friendliness to Cady because she does not want Cady to feel left out and eat on the toilet like she has been. When Cady is invited to eat lunch with The Plastics, it is Janis who encourages her to keep doing it so that she can report back to her and Damian about all the things that they say. Janis hates Regina because Regina is the reason that Janis is an outcast, having told everyone that Janis is a "space dyke." Janis is fascinated by The Plastics and what they do but she does not want Cady to actually be plastic like them. Janis is the anti-Plastic and rejects many of the ideals that Regina, Gretchen, and Karen hold. When Cady asks Damian and Janis if she can borrow a pink shirt for her to be able to eat with The Plastics, Janis responds that she does not own anything pink. This differentiates her from The Plastics, whose color palette largely consists of pink.

Pink is a color that is extremely important in *Mean Girls* and is a color which is associated with girls and femininity. Aside from the famous line "On Wednesdays we wear pink" which is found in both the film and musical iterations, pink is the color that leads *Mean Girls'* marketing, with their album cover consisting of a pink background and The Plastics all wearing pink dresses, and their official website containing a pink background. In "Pretty in Pink: Young Women Presenting Mature Sexual Identities," Kate Gleeson and Hannah Frith found, "Pink does not just represent femininity; it represents a particular kind of femininity-one which is passive, innocent, asexual, and immature (that is, girly and feminine)" (105). For The Plastics, pink is representative of being girly and feminine, and the "asexual" and "immature" aspects that can be associated with pink are offset by short skirts and showing lots of skin. It also presents an external image that makes the girls look more innocent than they are. Pink is the color of Girl

World, and by denying that she has anything pink, Janis is setting herself apart from the typical rules of Girl World.

Janis is also able to see through The Plastics' image and their color of choice. In "Apex Predator" when Janis is describing Regina's status in the school to Cady, she tells her, "Don't be fooled by the pink, she is not playing dolls. She is stalking the halls for the thrill of the kill." Janis is explaining to Cady that although Regina sports the color that is largely associated with femininity and girlhood, Regina is the furthest thing from this image of a pure and innocent little girl and is rather the apex predator who lives at the top of the food chain and instills fear in all of those below her. Janis also explains to Cady that Regina may seem glamorous and powerful, but really, she is just mean because she can be. Cady can enjoy tagging along with Regina for now while she is (or thinks she is) on Regina's good side, but as soon as she steps out of line, Regina will attack Cady to maintain her power, which is what she has done to Janis in the past.

Because Regina has been nasty to Janis previously, Janis is quick to help Cady when she is seeking revenge against Regina for kissing Aaron. At the beginning of "Revenge Party" she tells Cady "Now you know, Cady, Regina George is not your friend. We're your friends. And we're gonna make her pay." Janis' idea of being a good friend to Cady is being mean to Regina. Because Regina is mean to everyone else, Janis does not necessarily see what they're doing as being wrong, but rather it is something that must be done because it is what Regina deserves. There are several steps to this revenge, which include making Aaron dump Regina, making Regina gain weight, and making Regina's friends turn against her.

While on the surface the title of the musical *Mean Girls* seems to refer to The Plastics, it can really be applied to all female characters in the musical. Because Regina is so mean to everyone, Janis does not see her as a real person with real feelings. She sees her as Reed would

describe her, “vapid” and “trash,” which makes her undeserving of basic human treatment. Janis may not be backstabbing or manipulative in the way that Regina is, but she can still be brash in her own way, and insensitive to others’ feelings. This shows how Janis exists outside the ideals of traditional femininity. While Regina participates in relational aggression, Janis is more outwardly aggressive. In *Bullies and Mean Girls in Popular Culture,* Patrice A. Oppliger notes that relational aggression is synonymous with mean girls and that it includes “Spreading rumors, talking behind someone’s back, and ignoring and excluding others” (19). The reason that girls use relational aggression is because in this patriarchal society, girls are expected to be docile and kind, and not in any way aggressive. Relational aggression is a way of looking innocent on the outside while still manipulating others and maintaining power that way. Janis shows more masculine qualities by being more open with her aggression, something that sets her apart from The Plastics who are trying to enact patriarchal femininity.

Janis is outwardly aggressive because she does not care what people think about her and does not care to conform. She outlines her thoughts about conformity and the world in her anthem “I’d Rather Be Me.” During the assembly where all the junior girls must apologize to other girls in their grade, Janis apologizes for the whole plot she and Cady had against Regina, and also gives advice to the other girls about not caring about what other people think about them. “So raise your right finger and solemnly swear, whatever they say about me, I don’t care,” is what Janis proclaims to this room of girls (and Damian in disguise). Janis is encouraging them to be themselves no matter what, asserting that it does not matter what the other girls may say about them, whether that be to their face or behind their backs. Her claim is “I’d rather be me than be with you.” She explains that she would rather be herself and be comfortable with who she is than go along with people she does not like just to fit in and be popular. While Janis has

been mean to Regina, she admits to this, unlike Regina, who maintains her innocence most of the musical. Because Janis does not care if people see her as feminine and girly, she is going to be forthright about her wrongdoings and own up to her actions.

Janis cements her place as the feminist voice of reason in the show when she says "We're supposed to all be ladies and be nurturing and care, is that really fair? Boys get to fight, we have to share." Janis is drawing attention to the fact that girls are meant to be matronly and caring, whereas boys get to be violent and aggressive. Janis calls out the patriarchal nature of what is expected of her and other girls and asks that they all flip off the patriarchy to the way that they are expected to behave. This anger about fighting the patriarchy and not acting the way that girls are "supposed" to act is part of the reason Janis and Regina do not get along. Regina is basically the embodiment, at least on the outside, of what it means to act like a "lady," an image that Janis actively rejects.

Regina George: Mean is Easier than Nice

Regina's cultivated image of being a lady and being feminine is something of which she is aware and proud. Regina gets to introduce herself in "Meet the Plastics," after a brief introduction by Damian and Janis. The way that Regina describes herself is very telling of who she is and what she thinks about herself. "My name is Regina George, and I am a massive deal. Fear me, love me, stand and stare at me...I've got money and looks...this whole school humps my leg like a Chihuahua." Regina is very self-aware of her status within the school. She knows that she is beautiful, and she uses that fact along with the fact that she comes from a wealthy family to her advantage. Her looks and her wealth are her capital that have given her status within the

school. In Landry's study, she found, "Attractiveness, whiteness, and wealth are rewarded with popularity in girl culture" (81). These are all things that Regina possesses, and since she has these things in excess, she is rewarded by being the most popular girl in school. She also uses her sexuality as a tool to get what she wants, as seen in a few instances throughout the course of the musical. Here she is blatantly saying that students at the school desire her sexually by saying they "hump" her leg.

Regina also explains that to her, fear and love are the same thing. It does not matter if the students at the school either fear her or love her. Either way, she is still a "massive deal" and still resides at the top of the pyramid. Regina maintains her power by having a balance of both a feminine and girly external appearance while also possessing the ability to manipulate others and play mind games with them through relational aggression. She keeps herself amused by teasing the other students, a lioness playing with her prey. Regina is the Queen Bee, defined by Wiseman as "The epitome of teen girl perfection" (87), and the apex predator, a massive deal at North Shore High.

Regina is the most powerful girl in school, and her name even carries her power with it. Regina means "queen" in Latin, making Regina destined to be on top as soon as her parents named her. Kaveney also explains "[Regina's] surname George is that of the king from whom America took its independence" (100). Regina's name not only predestines her to be high school royalty, but it also serves to foreshadow what will happen to her as a ruler. She may be in power now, but as the American people did with King George, soon her subjects are going to seek their independence from her. Regina's power is only temporary, as is all power held by teenage girls in the high school. However, because teenage girls are given so little autonomy, Regina will settle for the minimal power that she holds amongst her peers because it is the only power that

she is able to have. Landry states, “The one kind of power [girls] do possess is the ability to establish hierarchies between groups of girls” (14). Regina may not have much power, but Regina does have looks, intelligence, and money, which she will use for the time being in order to maintain her status as the most popular girl at the school.

Regina’s intelligence is seen most clearly in the ability that she has to manipulate everyone around her. When Regina finds out from Gretchen that Cady likes Aaron (after Gretchen tells Cady “Ex-boyfriends are off limits to friends, that’s just like, the rules of feminism”), Regina decides that even though she is dating Shane Oman, she is going to get Aaron back. Regina is like a child who only wants a toy when another child is playing with it. Regina does not actually want to date Aaron again; she only wants him so that Cady can’t have him and to show Cady that she reigns. In order to get Aaron back after having previously broken up with him, she sings him the song “Someone Gets Hurt” at a Halloween party. This song is meant to manipulate Aaron into getting back with her. Though Regina was the one who broke up with Aaron, she turns the situation on him to make him feel guilty about their breakup and make him feel as though he is the one who caused it to happen. At the same time, she uses her sexuality and flirts with him to win him over.

Regina starts the song by telling Aaron that she knows she’s beautiful but that it’s just “show” and accuses Aaron of having used her for her body and to gain popularity. She also switches the blame by asking him, “Was I too proud with you? Was I too cold and forbidding? And you chose her over me, are you kidding?” Regina is attempting to make Aaron feel guilty by implying that he finds her proud and cold, and that he chose Cady over her. Because Aaron is vulnerable, as he is the one who was originally broken up with, he is easily persuaded by Regina to feel bad about what she is saying. Regina is also scantily clad in a Playboy bunny costume,

and uses this to her advantage, touching him often and attempting to seduce him. In addition to telling Aaron that she is "human too," and he is in the wrong for not seeing her that way before, she also tells Aaron that he's "hot" and "fine," reminding him of the sexual chemistry that they have together. Regina is using her sexuality as a weapon here to get what she wants, and ultimately, it works.

Though this song is used as an obvious manipulation of Aaron in order to get back at Cady, there is some truth to what Regina is singing, and this becomes clearer the more the show goes on. Regina insists that "It's fine, 'til someone gets hurt," discussing her and Aaron's breakup. For Regina, someone getting hurt does not really matter because she is not usually the one who ends up getting hurt but rather, is the one doing the hurting. In this instance of seducing Aaron, it starts out as a manipulation and a way to get Aaron to feel sorry for her; she is not really hurt. Regina also claims that "This is performance, this is all self-defense" about the way that she acts around others. While she is lying to guilt-trip Aaron, there is also truth in this. Being a part of The Plastics is a performance. She must act a certain way in order to fit in and belong in her group, just like everyone else in the school. And while Regina may not see the way she's acting as being a performance, it most likely started that way, as it did for Cady. Cady becomes plastic after she pretends to be plastic. Act a certain way long enough, and it stops being acting and starts being reality, which is where the lines are blurred for Regina. She is acting as the Queen Bee, a role that she is trying to fulfill. How much of this is an act and how much of it is real is unclear until Regina is the one who gets hurt.

Regina gets hurt when she loses everything. Cady finds out that Regina is cheating on Aaron and tells him, causing the two of them to break up. She also gives Regina Kalteen bars, which she claims help people lose weight, when in fact they make people gain weight. Regina

eats these bars and gains weight, most of which goes to her butt. This results in her skirt not fitting for The Plastics' Rocking Around the Pole Christmas performance, causing Regina to lose her skirt on stage in front of the whole school. Because the musical has been adapted into modern day instead of being set in the film's original time period of 2004, it takes place in the age of social media. Everyone snaps a picture of Regina's large derriere, embarrassing her on the internet. This causes a chain of events to happen. She can no longer follow the rules she made herself about what can be worn at the lunch table, because most of her clothes do not fit her anymore. Gretchen, Karen, and Cady stand up to Regina, which causes her to lose her status as the Queen Bee.

In "Fearless," Cady attempts to apologize to Regina for everyone turning on her, to which Regina responds "It's fine for you, new hair, new skirt. It's fine, 'til someone gets hurt." Now that Regina is no longer the Queen Bee, she can see the materialism that comes with the position. Cady is fine now because she has new things and is the shiny new play-thing within the school. But just like what happened to Regina, Regina knows that Cady will end up being betrayed and hurt in the end. High school students can be petty, and seeking validation through material means is never going to be a sustaining path. Regina is saying though it is fine for now, it will not be forever, and Cady is going to end up getting hurt, just like her.

While Regina is right about the fact that Cady gets hurt by becoming the Queen Bee, part of this hurt is caused by Regina herself, who spreads the pages of The Burn Book around the school when she finds out that she was not invited to Cady's house party. Regina adds her own name to the book and writes that she is a "fugly cow" (changed from "fugly slut" in the film), in order to exonerate herself from the writing of the book. Regina is attempting to regain her power in the school and get revenge against Cady by both implicating Cady in the writing of the book

and by causing the junior girls to be on the same level as Regina: low and angry. Her plan is to have the girls see what is written about them in these pages, start blaming each other for the content, and start admitting that some of these comments are things that the girls have said about their friends behind their backs.

The plan is revealed in the song "World Burn," in which Regina explains that she wants to "watch the world burn and everyone get mean." The other girls at the school think that Regina is mean, but Regina wants to show them that they are just as bad as she is, they just hide it more than her. Landry found that meanness and social power are linked, and since Regina has the most social power in the school, her meanness is more obvious to the other girls (81). By spreading the pages of The Burn Book, Regina is attempting to turn a mirror on the girls to make them see that it is not just her who has been tearing them down this whole time, but that they have been tearing down each other. She still sees herself as the truly powerful one in the school, and she believes that by leveling the playing field and watching the "world burn," everyone else will see her as powerful again and she will be able to regain her spot at the top of the pyramid.

Regina's actions result in the assembly that collects the junior girls together to talk about the way that they have been treating each other. It is during this assembly that Regina learns that Janis and Cady had a plan to ruin her life. When Regina storms out of the school, angrily telling off Cady, she gets hit by a bus. Though it sounds dark, Regina getting hit by the bus was the sort of karmic retribution that she deserved for making all the girls in the school fight and for all the awful things that she did to them. In order for Regina to see the error of her ways, she had to go through something traumatic, which for her was almost dying.

In these teen girl stories, the Queen Bee must always receive her comeuppance for balance to be regained in the world. Sometimes after the Queen is defeated, she is redeemed and

sometimes she is not, as will be seen in subsequent chapters. In this instance, Regina is redeemed. She pays for her sins and gets to live. Though it is left unclear whether Regina regains her spot at the top of the food chain, she and Cady get a moment of reconciliation at the Spring Fling that has those characters ending on good terms. Over the course of the musical, Regina and Cady have both realized that being mean to other girls and attempting to be powerful within the school does not actually bring them any happiness.

Gretchen Wieners: And None for Gretchen Wieners

Regina's poor treatment of her classmates was often facilitated by her followers, Gretchen and Karen. Gretchen is arguably the most tragic character in the show. She serves as Regina's minion, doing anything that her queen asks her to do. This makes her what Wiseman would call "The Pleaser:" "This person will do almost anything to be in the group or gain favor from the Queen Bee" (94). Gretchen not only serves as The Pleaser, who does anything Regina wants, but also "The Sidekick" and "The Banker," as she both serves as Regina's second in command, and gets Regina all the gossip she can find. In "Meet the Plastics," Gretchen compares herself to Regina, saying "If Regina is the sun, then I'm a disco ball, 'cause I'm just as bright and fun, if you've had alcohol." From the very start, this illustrates Gretchen's insecurities. She is the most insecure of all the characters, not only reflected in the statements she makes about herself as only being fun if alcohol is involved, but also because she does not know who she is without Regina. All the other characters have at least a foundation of who they are, and know who they truly are, even if they get lost along the way. Gretchen, on the other hand, has no real grasp on

who she is. She lives only to serve Regina, saying that she spends “every waking hour” doing things to make sure that Regina maintains her power.

The musical also makes a statement about Gretchen’s role as a minority and her identity. Gretchen is canonically Jewish, and in the original Broadway cast, she is played by Ashley Park, an Asian American actress. In this way, Gretchen is a minority both ethnically, religiously, and racially. This is further exacerbated by the fact that Gretchen is flanked by two blonde, white girls at all time. Gretchen looks different than her fellow Plastics, which further complicates her journey for her own identity.

Gretchen’s complicated relationship to her identity leads to her deep insecurity, which she reveals to Cady in the song, “What’s Wrong With Me?” She sings “Tell me what’s wrong with me, my body, face, my hair. Tell me all my many faults, tell me like you care.” This lyric reveals that Gretchen believes that there is something innately wrong with her, and that she must be criticized and told what these faults are. Criticism to her is a sign of caring. Because her friendship with Regina is based on Gretchen always giving and Regina always taking, Gretchen does not know what it is like to have a real friend. A real, caring friend to her is someone who tears her down. Gretchen listens to everything that Regina says, so much so that she does not listen to anyone else, even though she knows this is not the right way to act. She continues, “Mama called me beautiful, don’t believe her anymore. Now I’m listening to you, what do I do that for?” Gretchen is self-aware enough to know that she listens to Regina’s opinion of her even when she should not, even when she is getting affirmation in other places. The only person’s opinion she cares about is Regina’s, because she is in an abusive relationship with her. Regina makes Gretchen believe that no one else will want her around, manipulating Gretchen the way she does others in order to keep Gretchen doing her bidding. Just like most people in abusive

relationships, Gretchen realizes that there is something off here, but she is not confident enough to realize what it is or break free from the relationship. She believes that she needs Regina or else she is nothing. Because she lives in a society that values girls for their looks and social status, Gretchen must latch onto Regina and stay in power in order to be anyone or anything at all.

When Gretchen does not have anyone to latch on to, she is lost. When Regina loses her status as Queen Bee, Gretchen's first question in "Fearless" is "Who is my boss, now Regina is gone?" Gretchen does not know how to exist on her own without serving someone else, which is why this is her first concern. She does not have an identity apart from being the Sidekick. This is why she immediately starts following Cady. Her identity solely exists as that of a Sidekick and Pleaser. In "What's Wrong With Me? (Reprise)" she asks "What's wrong with me? Different boss, same old song. I try so hard. Is that what's wrong? It's like all I do is plan for joy I don't get to feel...who am I really?" After serving Cady for a short amount of time, Gretchen is questioning her role in life again, more critically than she was before. She is realizing that serving someone else is not what makes her happy, she is just doing things to make someone else happy, which has no real benefits for her. She is feeling unappreciated for all the work that she does for other girls and is barely able to reap the benefits. After serving under both Cady and Regina, Gretchen is finally realizing that this is not the life she really wants and is hopefully able to find her own identity and be her own person.

Karen Smith: The Dumbest Person You Will Ever Meet

The third and final Plastic, Karen, does not seem to have the same concerns about her identity that Gretchen does. Karen is the "dumb" one, a trope typical of the teen girl film. Her

main role in the musical is to serve as comic relief, but she is a bit deeper than she appears to be. Like Cady, Karen is also naïve, though her naïveté comes more from the fact that she simply does not care to understand things, rather than a completely different world view like that of Cady. Karen's introduction of herself in "Meet the Plastics" reads: "My name is Karen, my hair is shiny, my teeth are perfect, my skirt is tiny. It barely covers my perky hiney. My name is Karen, I may not be smart. That's it." Karen is self-aware in the fact that she knows she is not the brightest and that she is valued mostly for her looks, but that does not really bother her. Whereas Gretchen tries incredibly hard to get and maintain her power, and Regina maintains her power by being manipulative, Karen seems to be popular just because of her looks. It is something she kind of stumbled into and just stayed there because she was not smart enough to do anything else about it. Karen is simple and buys into many of the patriarchal ideas of what it means to be a feminine girl, but she is also kind and lacks the twisted motivations of Regina and Gretchen.

Karen's solo song is the song "Sexy," which explains that on Halloween, girls can wear any type of sexy costume that they want. This phenomenon is written about by Wiseman, who states that a girl is "test-driving her power" when she wears a sexy Halloween costume (178). Since the adolescent girl must tread the waters between being labeled either a prude or a slut, on Halloween she is able to be whatever she wants to be without fear of judgement. In the song, Karen reveals that she knows her role in The Plastics is being "the hot one" which she refers to as "a full-time gig, looking like what people want." Again, Karen buys into the ideas of what it means to be a hot teenage girl, but she knows that she is doing it, while also being clueless as to its connotations. She does not really understand why she can't wear a vest, which is what Regina tells her, but she still wants to look hot, so she does what she is told. Her identity is being "hot" and while that may be vapid, at least she knows who she is.

Karen states that this idea that girls can be whatever they want to be on Halloween and be sexy is “Modern feminism talking, I expect to run the world in shoes I cannot walk in.” While this was written as a joke, Karen also is not wrong, and is making quite an intelligent statement. Modern feminism is about equality, and letting women be as feminine or as masculine as they want, so long as they are happy with their decisions. The irony in the lyric is that Karen believes she can run the world, but she believes she must be in uncomfortable shoes to do it. However, whatever shoes Karen would choose to wear would be her decision, and modern feminism would dictate that other people should not judge her for her choice of footwear. Though Karen’s fate is unknown at the end of the musical, as are the other characters’, it can be assumed that Karen is content to just be, and to be sexy wherever she likes.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the only way that any of these characters can find themselves and fight superficiality is to break free of the patriarchal notions of femininity and what this means in regards to power. These girls see no other means of gaining power except through being popular within their high school. To be popular means to enact a certain type of femininity, which includes utilizing relational aggression in order to gain that popularity and power. Girls are told that they cannot be outwardly aggressive, as this is something that is considered masculine, which pushes relational aggression, and leads to these girls becoming mean girls.

Cady is only able to stop being plastic when she has a realization that being mean to other girls never really got her anything except popularity, which is fleeting. True power comes from being an individual and finding strength in that. This is something that Janis has realized all

along, as she proactively fights the ideas of what it means to be a valued teenage girl within the high school. Regina, who is the epitome of teenage royalty, is only able to see the error of her ways when she goes through something traumatic. Because of this traumatic event, she is able to put her life into perspective and realize that she was not truly happy being a mean girl. Gretchen, who exudes insecurity, must grapple with feelings of finding her own power without a leader to follow. She must find her own self and be an individual in order to find this power. And finally, there is Karen, who though presented as the dumb character, is truly the smart one, who never really feels the need to be anyone but herself. That self just so happens to be popular and beautiful.

Rex Reed may find this musical to be "teenybopper trash" and "vapid" but these are just stereotypes held about teenage girls which are ideas that *Mean Girls* is actively trying to fight against. The characters *are* vapid and that is the point, only when they come to realize their vapidity are they able to fight it. Fighting the patriarchy means being intellectually courageous, and over the course of the show, Cady, Janis, Regina, Gretchen, and Karen are able to show their intelligence and be fearless in the face of the expectations of how teenage girls should act and the restrictions that come with these expectations. The audience leaves the musical feeling positive and uplifted, and knowing that there is more value in being a star than there is in being plastic. The musical also teaches that in order for the mean girl to reform, she must go through a life altering event, and this reform either comes in the form of redemption, as such is the case with Regina and Cady, or death, as will be seen in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER III: DRESSED TO KILL: SURVIVING CLIQUES AND FIGHTING CONFORMITY IN *HEATHERS THE MUSICAL*

Introduction

For the teenage girl, there are many emblems of power: A Coach purse, new Ugg boots, a hot boyfriend, or perhaps a tiny pink skirt that shows off a perky hiney. For the girls in *Heathers the Musical,* the true emblem of power comes in the form of a red scrunchie. This scrunchie is like a crown, passed down from one Queen Bee to the next. Based on the 1989 film *Heathers,* the musical iteration maintains this all-important hair accessory. This satirical black comedy grapples with the issues of teenage identity, popularity, power, and femininity, though unlike *Mean Girls,* in *Heathers the Musical,* the consequence for those characters who bully is a bit more dire: death. Originally a flop and controversial, *Heathers* shows teenage girls as mean, ruthless, and inconsiderate. Written by Daniel Waters, the film was a counter-point to the wholesome and redeemable characters in John Hughes' Brat Pack films. Waters' film features foul-mouthed, shamelessly sexual, and ruthless girls who kick others down to get what they want. The musical maintains these elements, showing the consequences that come with tearing others down in the search for power. This chapter will argue that this is ultimately the result of a patriarchal society which privileges men.

Set in the late 1980s, *Heathers the Musical* follows high school senior Veronica Sawyer as she navigates the landscape of Westerberg High. She gets taken in by the Heathers, the most popular girls in school, a group which consists of Heather Duke and Heather McNamara, and is spearheaded by Heather Chandler. Shortly after joining the Heathers, Veronica catches the eye of the new bad boy at school, Jason "J.D." Dean. After Veronica angers Heather Chandler at a

party, she and J.D. go to Chandler's to attempt an apology. Instead of making up with her, Veronica and J.D. accidentally kill her and frame it as a suicide. They get away with it, and Chandler becomes a martyr within their school. As J.D. and Veronica continue their volatile relationship, they also "accidentally" kill two school jocks, Kurt and Ram, and once again frame them as suicides. While the school is gaining notoriety with the increase of suicides, Veronica realizes that she must get away from J.D. He reveals to her that he intends to blow up their entire school and frame it as a group suicide. Veronica confronts J.D. at the school where he has planted some dynamite, and after an altercation, J.D. ends up strapping the dynamite to himself instead, letting Veronica and the other students live. At the end, Veronica makes up with her former best friend Martha Dunnstock and some semblance of order is restored in the school, as Veronica takes over as Queen Bee.

Veronica must go through hell to find her identity. Her first level of hell is becoming a Heather, which strips her of that which makes her unique. Roz Kaveney points out, "By giving [The Heathers] the same name, Waters makes it explicit that they are generic, that there are Heathers in every school, in every social setting" (52). All schools have Heathers, but not all schools have Veronicas. By joining the Heathers, Veronica gives up her personal identity and becomes generic. Veronica is willing to become part of the collective because of the power that comes with it. Like being a Plastic, being a Heather means ultimate power in the school. The difference between *Mean Girls* and *Heathers the Musical* however, is that the consequence of the loss of individuality is death. The popular girl must die -literally or figuratively- and be redeemed through this death to become an individual. Before she can die and be redeemed, she must fight the patriarchal ideals about what is expected of her behavior, which includes the

expression of her femininity. Only after her death and the destruction of the patriarchy is she truly able to find her identity.

Veronica Sawyer: Let's Make it Beautiful

Veronica is one of these popular girls who is redeemed through figurative death, though she does not start out as a popular girl. Her character is first revealed in the opening number of the musical which is framed as a diary entry. In "Beautiful," she writes "Dear diary, I believe I'm a good person. You know, I think there's good in everyone. But, here we are. First day of senior year! And, uh, I look around at these kids I've known all my life and I ask myself, 'What happened?'" Veronica reveals that the people she goes to school with all bully each other and treat each other poorly, when in the past, before high school, they were nice to each other. She is not able to actually voice these opinions out loud because it will not change anything, which is why she writes her frustrations into her diary.

This diary is essential to Veronica's self-expression. Elline Lipkin describes a study which found that diaries "Were the only place girls felt they could legitimately unleash their rage" (92). Because Veronica is a girl and not a boy, she has been taught to hide her aggression; in Western tradition, girls are encouraged to not be outwardly aggressive in the same way that boys are. Over the course of the song, she does try to stand up for herself against popular jock Kurt, which just results in her getting bullied further. Veronica believes it is a moot point to express her desires to go back to kindness out loud, as this does no good. However, despite the constant bullying, being called a "nerd" and having lunch trays knocked out of her hands,

Veronica still believes that the students of Westerberg High School can be "beautiful" and kind to each other once more.

Veronica believes that everyone can be kind, but for the time being, she is tired of being bullied. Veronica and her best friend Martha Dunnstock, called Martha "Dumptruck" by the other students, are on the lower end of the social hierarchy, making them easy targets for bullying. In an attempt to stop the constant onslaught of comments aimed towards her, Veronica plots to join the Heathers. Because the Heathers are at the top of the social hierarchy and are the ones doing most of the bullying, they are immune to having these comments aimed towards them. In "Beautiful" Veronica explains that "They're solid Teflon, not bothered, never harassed. I would give anything to be like that."

Veronica desires to be unbothered because she is looking for any way to make her last year of high school bearable. She sees the Heathers as her solution to this. She runs into the Heathers in the bathroom, where they are interrupted by the teacher Mrs. Fleming, who threatens them with detention for missing class. Veronica emerges from a stall with a forged hall pass, claiming that they are all on this pass for the yearbook committee. This forgery is what grants Veronica the attention of the Heathers, and forgery becomes an important theme throughout the show. The word forge can mean both to fake and to construct, and Veronica does both. In his book *Heathers,* John Ross Bowie points out, "We start to forge our identities in high school" (23). Here, it means to construct, and applies to Veronica. She is still trying to figure out herself and her place within the high school. In that process, she forges an identity as a Heather. Veronica is never *really* a Heather. She is always Veronica, but she pretends to be a Heather. Kaveney also points out this idea of forgery within the story and explains how it relates to the ideas of insincerity and the stealing of identities (53). Veronica is attempting to steal the identity

of the Heathers so that she can reap the benefits of it. She is rejecting Veronica, and instead forging a new identity, which is false and insincere, all in her attempt to find power within the school.

This search for power leads to this interaction in the bathroom. After getting their attention, Veronica asks the Heathers if she can sit with them at lunch. Instead of fully asking to join their group, she just dips her toes in, not believing that she has the power or influence to ask for anything more. To her surprise, the Heathers allow Veronica to join their group because they believe that she has potential to be beautiful. Chandler tells her that "For a greasy little nobody, you do have good bone structure." Recognizing that she is a "nobody," Chandler insinuates that Veronica's only worth lies in her external appearance. The Heathers don't pay attention to Veronica until they see what she can do for them (forgeries), and when they see that she has potential to be superficially attractive. The ability to be externally appealing is important in Girl World. Rosalind Wiseman reveals, "Adolescence is a beauty pageant. Even if your daughter doesn't want to be a contestant, others will look at her as if she is. In Girl World, everyone is automatically entered" (152).

Originally, Veronica has had no interest in joining the pageant, just like Cady in *Mean Girls.* However, to be a part of the popular clique means to be more visible, and the most visible girls must be the winners of the pageant. Because of this, the Heathers decide that they must give Veronica a makeover in order for her to be able to be seen with them. They put makeup on her and tell her that she could lose some weight, attempting to make her their idea of "beautiful," which lines up with traditional beauty standards. Veronica has always believed that being beautiful comes from the inside, but the Heathers negate that notion by telling her she is only beautiful if she appears so on the outside. She must not only compete in the pageant but place in

it. Wiseman continues on to say that the girl who wins the pageant "has to sacrifice her individual identity" because she is now conforming to typical beauty standards (153). Veronica is giving up her identity, forging a new one to fit in.

Now that Veronica has forged this new identity, she appears to have redefined what it means to her to be beautiful. At the beginning of "Beautiful," Veronica states that she and her classmates can be beautiful again by being kind to one another. After she receives her makeover, she starts to see external appearance as what makes someone beautiful. Veronica has some new-found confidence, a confidence which comes with the attention she receives from other students. This new look is making her feel more confident and more powerful. Nicole E.R. Landry found, "Girl power is superficially located within feminine standards of beauty" (54). Now that Veronica fits in with this ideal of beauty, she has found power she never felt before. She sings "Ask me how it feels, looking like hell on wheels. My god, it's beautiful. I might be beautiful. And when you're beautiful, it's a beautiful frickin' day!"

Now that Veronica is receiving the attention she never got before and is being called things like "babe" instead of "nerd," her definition of beautiful has changed. She is externally beautiful and is seen with the Heathers, meaning that Veronica is being treated with the kindness that before, she only dreamt about. She comes to realize that to be treated well by her fellow classmates, she must be externally appealing. Her definition of the word "beautiful" becomes shallower because now that she is part of the in-crowd, nobody else really matters to her. It does not matter to her in the moment that others are still being bullied, because she no longer is. She seems to have forgotten that just because things are beautiful for her does not mean that they are that way for everybody, like her friend Martha, who Veronica abandons once she is a Heather.

Veronica gives up her real friendship with Martha in order to maintain her popularity and power. This role entails her doing Chandler's bidding and hanging out with girls who do not really care about her. Veronica puts up with this poor treatment so that she can get the perks that come with being popular. One of these perks is going to cool parties, where she gets to drink, smoke, and flirt. Veronica attends a party thrown by jocks Kurt and Ram, which though it starts as a good time, ends very badly for Veronica. Martha shows up at the party, believing that Ram invited her. In reality, Chandler had forced Veronica to write a forgery, pretending to be Ram inviting Martha to the party. The Heathers plan on pranking Martha, and have her see a pig piñata that is dressed up to look like her. Before Martha has the chance to see it, Veronica throws it into the pool. In this moment, Veronica is choosing her identity of Martha's friend over her fake identity of being a Heather. Veronica is willing to give up the only power she has in order to protect Martha.

Protecting Martha is a risky choice for Veronica to make, but she chooses her morals over her fake friends. Wiseman explains that being a part of a clique can be dangerous for a girl because she may feel as though she must maintain her relationships no matter how she is treated, and that it can be hard to maintain ethics when part of a group (81). By going against Chandler, Veronica is realizing that it is more important for her to have *good* friendships rather than *powerful* friendships. She has found her moral compass once again by breaking free from the group, though her realization is short lived. This act of defiance angers Chandler, and she is angered even further when Veronica throws up on her shoes. Chandler tells her that she is going to ruin Veronica's reputation because of these events, and for a high school girl, that means ruining her life.

After the party, Veronica knows that her life is about to be over, and that she is a "Dead Girl Walking." Veronica decides that since she only has a few hours left to "live" as a popular girl, what she wants to do with that time is have sex with J.D., the mysterious new boy who she had just met and had a flirtation with. With this new desire in mind, she sneaks through J.D.'s window into his room. She knows that her reputation is going to be ruined, so Veronica believes that she can do whatever she likes without facing any consequences. She also must forge a new identity, as she is no longer a Heather or a Veronica, because she is "dead." This new Veronica takes charge and is in control, and she takes the dominant position during this sex act. In her attempt to find herself, Veronica is trying different activities to see what appeals to her.

One of the activities that Veronica is exploring is engaging in sexual activity. In *Understanding Teenage Girls: Culture, Identity, and Schooling* by Horace R. Hall and Andrea Brown-Thirston, the authors write, "This search for 'the true me' becomes further complicated by a burgeoning sexual identity" (2). Veronica is letting her sexual identity lead in her exploration of finding her true self. And because she believes that her reputation will be ruined no matter what she does, she does not fear being called a "slut" by having sex and taking control of her own sexuality. Typically, the teen girl must walk a fine line between being called a "prude" or being called a "slut," as a result of the patriarchy defining women as either madonnas or whores. But in this moment, that is not something that Veronica is worried about. She is dead, and dead girls can't be sluts.

Not worrying about what will be said about her is very liberating for Veronica, though the freedom that comes with being a dead girl does not last long. After her tryst with J.D., Chandler appears to Veronica in a dream, calling her a "slut" and a "dirty whore" (Murphy and O'Keefe 56). Through this dream, Veronica realizes that she is not dead yet, and still has a

chance to live. After being slut-shamed in her dream by Chandler, Veronica realizes that this could be her reality as a consequence of having sex with J.D. Even though Chandler treats her terribly and will most likely call Veronica these names if she finds out about what happened in J.D.'s bedroom, Veronica realizes that she still values her relationship with Chandler. Without Chandler, Veronica is back to being nothing and being powerless. Though there is a sense of freedom that comes with exploring her own identity, sexually and otherwise, Veronica knows that she is still in high school and the only way for her to have any semblance of power is for her to be on Chandler's good side. Veronica has had a taste of power and she does not want to lose it.

To not lose this power, Veronica must maintain her popularity. Landry's findings state, "In their peer world, popular girls possess the most power. Thus, being powerful was perceived as something that only popular girls get to experience" (54). Though Veronica has a moment in which she has reconnected with Martha, and showed true kindness, she has now slept and realizes that she does not want to lose the power that she had, and the only way for her to maintain that power is to be popular. The only way for her to be popular is to get back on Chandler's good side. She is once again willing to give up her relationship with Martha in order to have a relationship with power.

To have this relationship, Veronica must make things okay with Chandler and secure her status as a Heather. After her dream, Veronica tells J.D. that last night's encounter with her asserting her individuality "was a sweet fantasy. A world without Heather. A world where everyone is free" (Murphy and O'Keefe 57). Here, "Heather" is a stand-in for the larger idea of cliques, particularly the idea that these cliques and societal hierarchies are not going away. Veronica's fantasy is a world in which people like Chandler don't exist; where everyone is free

because they do not have to buy into the idea that being popular is the only way to be powerful. This fantasy soon becomes somewhat of a reality.

This reality comes when Veronica and J.D. go to Chandler's house. Veronica intends to apologize and make up with Chandler, after concluding that she can never be free of the Heathers or what they represent. She does not want to go back to the way things were, when people ignored her and treated her badly. In an attempt to make up with Chandler, Veronica promises to bring her a prairie oyster, a hangover cure consisting mainly of raw egg and Worcestershire sauce. J.D. "jokes" about bringing her a cup of drain cleaner instead, pouring it into a cup and setting it on the counter. Veronica refutes this idea, saying that it will kill her. However, the two liquids are in identical cups, and Veronica accidentally grabs the cup with drain cleaner. Chandler drinks this blue liquid, and subsequently dies from it. In a panic after Chandler dies, Veronica and J.D. decide to frame their "accidental" murder of Chandler as a suicide. Veronica forges an identity once again, this time as Chandler. In doing so, Veronica creates a new identity for Chandler, one that never really existed. Veronica constructs Chandler as a much deeper person than she really was, and in doing so, makes Chandler even more popular in death than she was in life.

Though she reaches martyr status, Chandler is still dead. And with Chandler dead, Veronica gets a little bit more freedom while there is no reigning Heather. However, Veronica is still not free from the constraints of patriarchy. As stated earlier, girls and women are often either labeled as not being sexual enough or being too sexual. This is why after Kurt and Ram spread a rumor that Veronica had a three-way sexual encounter with them, that she gets labeled a "slut" and a "whore." Veronica had been called a slut previously in her dream by Chandler, but now in reality, she is being name-called by the students at the school.

Veronica is being called a name which is thrown around very often in the high school. Wiseman labels “slut” as the “Uber-Rep” and writes, “There are few other words that carry so much weight, have so much baggage, and control a girl’s behavior and decision making more” (204). Getting called a slut has the power to ruin a teenage girl’s life. Veronica has just avoided tarnishing her reputation at the hands of Chandler by her death, but it is still ruined with this rumor spread about her. The reputation of being a slut is something that has the potential to follow Veronica forever and can change the perceptions that other people may have about her before they even meet her.

Lipkin also comments on the label “slut” and states, “Dressing sexily, showing off a budding sexuality, and being conventionally ‘attractive’ are part of what a teenage girl is told she should do-but to a mysterious point” (75). In other words, in order to be a Heather and enact the role of a standard femininity (a role set forth by the patriarchy), a girl must walk a very fine line, which, if she crosses, can ruin her life and her reputation. She must be sexy, but not too sexy. The lines are blurred in this area, and to be powerful, the teenage girl must do a balancing act. Landry explains this balancing act when she writes, “Possessing power means a girl must learn to walk a thin line between extremes of femininity,” which includes not being too sexual (83). A girl must learn to balance all things if she desires to be powerful. She cannot be too feminine, but she cannot be too masculine, either. This can also be seen with The Plastics, who offset their innocent pink clothing with the length of their short skirts. For Veronica, it takes one rumor to push her off this tight rope and send her plummeting from the top of the social hierarchy to the bottom.

Veronica’s life is completely shaken up once she falls from power. This fall is not something that she and J.D. take lightly. To get revenge against Kurt and Ram for ruining

Veronica's reputation and for hurting her, J.D. convinces her that they should fake a double suicide of Kurt and Ram, as they did with Chandler. His plan includes shooting them with what he calls "ich luge" bullets, which he tells Veronica work as powerful tranquilizers. However, "ich luge" translates to "I lie," and J.D. has misled Veronica. Rather than tranquilizers, J.D. shoots the jocks with real bullets, killing them. Though horrified that J.D. has actually murdered the boys, Veronica still continues with the forgery, planting a letter claiming that Kurt and Ram killed themselves to hide their forbidden love for each other. She starts to realize that being with J.D. is dangerous, but Veronica feels as though she has no one else to turn to. After isolating herself from Martha, having her reputation damaged by the rumors, and ditching the Heathers, she has no one else but J.D. He tells her "Our Love is God" and that their love has the power to do anything, like "start and finish wars." Veronica has nowhere to turn, no real friends anymore, and no power. J.D. is promising power to Veronica in the form of their love, and Veronica does not want to give up that chance for power. Before, she was made to believe that the only power a teen girl could possess was through being popular, but with J.D., Veronica sees another avenue through which she can feel powerful in a world that disparages her gender.

Veronica feels powerful with J.D. and with his belief that their love is "the asteroid that's overdue," but she also just wants to be a normal teenager. She sings "Seventeen" with him, revealing her desire to forget the murdering and just be teenagers for once. She asks him "Can't we be seventeen? That's all I want to do." By the end of the number, J.D. has agreed to stop killing and be a normal teenager with Veronica. Shortly after agreeing to this, J.D. makes a comment about how Heather Duke and Heather McNamara deserve to die and reveals that he carries around a loaded gun. He does not have the same desire to be a normal teenager that

Veronica does. Reaching her breaking point, Veronica ends their relationship, losing the last semblance of power that she had.

After losing her power, Veronica is only able to gain it back when she "dies" a second time. She fakes her own suicide when J.D. sneaks into her room and reveals his plan to blow up the entire school and frame it as a group suicide. By pretending to be dead, Veronica is taking her life in her own hands. She must be resurrected in order to find her new identity, one without J.D. and without any Heathers. This new identity, one which is attempting to find power without a relationship to a boy and without popularity, is also one which pushes Veronica to put an end to J.D.'s actions. Veronica goes to Westerberg, where there is a pep rally, and where J.D. has planned to plant his bomb below the gym. She confronts J.D. in the boiler room and tells him to "Step away from the bomb" during the "Dead Girl Walking" reprise. Through being dead once again and then resurrected, Veronica is truly able to find her voice and self-worth.

This self-worth is a big turning point for Veronica in forging her own identity. Lipkin argues, "Girls who are comfortable with conflict or who won't deny their own emotions reflect a stronger sense of self-worth...and...if their survival depends on raising their voices, they are also more prone to feel entitled to do so" (96). In this instance, Veronica's survival literally depends on her ability to speak up and stop J.D. from what he is about to do. She is finally comfortable confronting J.D. about his actions and the conflict that comes with that. She has a renewed sense of self and of worth, a worth that exists outside of being popular or that of being of value to a boy. She does not need to conform to the typical ideals of femininity which tell her to avoid confrontation and conflict and is instead able to save the other students at her school.

After confronting J.D., a fight ensues which results in Veronica shooting J.D. This wound is not fatal, and J.D. reappears and straps the bomb to himself. He decides to blow himself up

instead of the school, telling Veronica in “I Am Damaged” that he is too damaged to go on living, and that it is up to Veronica to make things okay within the school. She is the one who must wear the red scrunchie, which she does when she takes it from Heather Duke, who she runs into after J.D. dies.

Before taking the scrunchie from her, Duke says to Veronica “You look like hell” to which Veronica replies “Yeah? I just got back” (Murphy and O’Keefe 127). Veronica has been resurrected for the third time over the course of the story, and this final resurrection confirms her identity. She starts the “Seventeen” reprise, informing her classmates a “brand new sheriff’s come to town.” Veronica now wears the red scrunchie and rules the school, though not in the same way that Chandler has. The use of “Seventeen” here is also significant, as it once served as a romantic duet between her and J.D., and here it serves as a love note to her classmates. *Heathers the Musical w*riters Laurence O’Keefe and Kevin Murphy state “The real love story is Veronica and her flawed yet redeemable classmates” rather than that of Veronica and J.D. (2018). The happy ending of the story does not lie in the reconciliation of two lovers, but rather between Veronica and her classmates who she believes can be beautiful.

In “Seventeen (Reprise)” Veronica explains this belief. She sings “We are done with acting evil, we will lay our weapons down. We’re all damaged, we’re all frightened, we’re all freaks, but that’s alright. We’ll endure it, we’ll survive it.” As the new sheriff, Veronica’s goal is to make everyone feel seen and not alone. She wants to let them know that they are all scared teenagers, none of them have any clue what they are doing, and they are all outcasts, but it is okay to be that way. Similar to the ending with “I See Stars” in *Mean Girls*, *Heathers the Musical* ends with the message that everyone is beautiful in their own right and shines as an individual. They do not need to be mean to each other or try to be people that they are not. True

power and beauty come from being kind and from expressing individuality. Though Veronica states that she can't promise "no more Heathers" and that "high school may not ever end," she can still try to be happy for now and make a positive environment for her and her classmates. This means ruling as a Veronica and not as a Heather. Veronica makes up with Martha and remembers what is really important to her in her life. She has finally found her own identity outside of the Heathers after three different deaths and redemptions and is able to be beautiful in her own way.

Heather Chandler: Mythic Bitch

Veronica's idea of being beautiful has always meant to be kind and accepting to those around her, which is in contrast to her red scrunchie predecessor, Heather Chandler. Chandler is first introduced in "Beautiful," where Veronica describes her as "The almighty. She is a mythic bitch." Chandler is the Queen Bee in this story, who "floats above it all." Her existence is unreal, as she is the thing that all the girls in the school aspire to be. She is the mythic creature, exaggerated and fantastic. After her death, this mythic status becomes literal, as she appears to Veronica as a sort of ghost who watches her every move. This is similar to her living persona, watching all that Veronica does and strongly policing her looks and her actions. Chandler has a clear idea of how she wants the other Heathers to look and to act, which must line up with how she looks and acts. Chandler outlines these requirements in "Candy Store," explaining all the things she likes and how Veronica must also like these things in order to tag along with them. She tells Veronica that she likes "looking hot, buying stuff they cannot," "drinking hard, maxing dad's credit card," "Skippin' gym, scaring her, screwing him," "killer clothes," and "kicking

nerds in the nose." Chandler fits the stereotype of the high school mean girl, who cares about shopping, being attractive, getting attention from boys, and bullying.

The interests that Chandler holds are what qualify her as a Queen Bee and a mean girl. Heather Chandler is a mean girl like Regina George, though her meanness is more aggressive and straightforward than Regina's. In order to maintain popularity and the power that comes with it, these Queen Bees use meanness and relational aggression to maintain their status. In Landry's study, the girls she interviewed all agreed that meanness was an accepted way of behaving, and that popular girls "Are always mean, because this is how they maintain their place at the top. One girl argued, 'You can't be mean unless you're pretty'" (53). As mentioned before, the most popular girls in the high school are the ones who are the most attractive, the wealthiest, and the whitest. Girls like Regina and Chandler are physically beautiful and fit the idea of what it means to be feminine in their patriarchal society, so they are allowed to be mean as well.

Chandler and Regina are given more leeway when it comes to being aggressive, because in every other way, they are conforming to the patriarchal standards of beauty and femininity. These aggressive behaviors include relational aggression, but Landry also explains "Passive acts of aggression, shoving, yelling, name-calling, and even throwing objects conform to patriarchal and feminine standards" (86). In other words, acts of female aggression are acceptable so long as they are covert or unthreatening to males. Chandler is able to "scare" other girls and can enjoy "kicking nerds in the nose" because these things do not threaten the boys around her. Chandler may be aggressive, but she is still beautiful and rich, puts emphasis on her looks, and desires to please boys. Her femininity balances out her masculinity, which allows her to walk that thin line of being either too much or not enough.

This balancing act is also why Chandler can get away with saying things like "Why now are you pulling on my dick?" like she asks Veronica in "Candy Store." Chandler is able to pull off having more masculine qualities because in all other ways she is conforming to patriarchal ideals. In addition to getting away with more because of conforming to these standards, Chandler is also trying to enact male power. In a patriarchal society, masculine men are always the most powerful, so to take on more masculine qualities means more power. In her search for power, Chandler takes on some masculine qualities in addition to her feminine ones in order to assert her dominance more. Though originally attributed to Heather Duke in the film, the speaker of the "pulling on my dick" line has been changed for the musical, giving Chandler the phallus rather than Duke.

Discussing the film, Bowie writes that with this statement "She's trying to establish her masculinity, her alpha-male status at Westerburg" and states that this is a "chess move" in her attempt for power (81). Though he is discussing Duke in this statement, the same can be applied to Chandler, though Chandler is attempting to establish herself as the alpha-*being.* She is attempting to show her dominance over the other people at her school, and she knows that she will never have full power being a girl. Her chess move here is to state that she has the power because she is the carrier of the phallus. This masculine quality is contradicted shortly when Chandler emphasizes her traditional feminine qualities such as "shopping" and wearing "killer clothes."

While gendering herself as masculine in "Candy Store," she also genders herself as feminine in the musical when she tells Veronica "Well, fuck me gently with a chainsaw" (Murphy and O'Keefe 95). This statement is made to Veronica after Chandler's death. Her spirit insists upon the fact that she is a being which is capable of being "fucked." She exists with both

male and female genitals, in death possessing both masculine and feminine power, or what she aspired to do while living. The language that she uses to describe this dichotomy is also extremely violent, reiterating the fact that she is one of few female characters who can get away with being aggressive.

This dual-gendered and aggressive spirit has been reborn (though not redeemed) through her death. This mostly comes in the form of the identity that Veronica and J.D. have forged for her. Veronica writes a fake suicide note for Chandler, the content of which is revealed in the song "Me Inside of Me." In this note, Veronica has built Chandler's identity as someone who was insecure at the core, and though she appeared to be beautiful and powerful, she really struggled like everyone else. The note reads "No one thinks a pretty girl has feelings. No one gets her insecurity. I am more than shoulder pads and makeup. No one sees the me inside of me." Veronica is making it appear as though the reason that Chandler committed suicide was because nobody really understood her, and the Queen Bee crown sat heavy on her head.

This idea of Chandler being deeper than she really was is something that Dead Chandler rejects, responding to the content of the note with "Jesus, you're making me sound like Air Supply!" Chandler is rejecting anything that makes her seem weak or sensitive, even in death. What she soon realizes, however, is that what she perceives as weakness just increases her power. Once news gets out that Chandler has "committed suicide" and her suicide note gets out in the school, the students put her up on a pedestal, and she becomes even more mythic than she was before. Dead Chandler exclaims "I'm bigger than John Lennon!" The students of Westerberg have canonized Chandler, cementing her place at the top of the social hierarchy. Though she is dead, she remains the most popular girl in school, and therefore the most

powerful. The irony is that she becomes more powerful by being relatable and insecure, which are untrue, making her fame in death counterfeit.

Because this "nice" identity is a forgery, unlike Regina in *Mean Girls,* Chandler is never redeemed. In rebirth, there is a chance for redemption. Regina gets hit by the bus but does not die, coming back to life to see the error of her ways and make things right. Chandler does not do the same. Unlike Regina, Chandler is actually dead. Despite this, she gets her chance to be reborn in the form of both her suicide note and her appearance as a ghost. The forged version of her is redeemed, at least in the eyes of her classmates, who believe she has atoned for all her sins in this suicide note. But the audience, Veronica, and J.D. know the truth, and the Dead Chandler does not appear to be any nicer or any more redeemed than the living Chandler. She follows Veronica around, whining about the other Heathers touching her stuff and encouraging Veronica to be mean to Martha. Even in death, she must be in control of Veronica and hold that power over her that she had in life. Wiseman writes, "Never underestimate [the Queen Bee's] power over other girls" (87). Veronica has underestimated Chandler, believing that she no longer has power over her because she is no longer alive. But she is still the Queen Bee, and still has ultimate power.

Heather Duke: Shut up, Heather

This ultimate status is something that Heather Duke craves throughout the course of the musical. Duke is introduced along with the other Heathers during "Beautiful." Veronica describes her as having "No discernable personality, but her mom did pay for implants." Duke is thus presented as wealthy and as someone who cares about her appearance, two markers of a

popular girl. It is also revealed in the song that Duke suffers from an eating disorder, namely bulimia. This is a serious issue that affects many young men and women. Lipkin discusses eating disorders, explaining how many young women may obtain eating disorders for a number of reasons, including attempting to gain control or attempting to fit an ideal body image in a culture that emphasizes thinness (51). Duke's bulimia is an attempt to both gain control and to have a certain body type. Duke can be seen feeling the pressures of being popular upon her first introduction. She has undergone plastic surgery at a young age in order to obtain a certain silhouette and has an eating disorder in an attempt to look a certain way.

Part of the reason that Duke feels these pressures is because she is a minority among her group. In the original off-Broadway cast of *Heathers the Musical,* Duke is played by Alice Lee, an Asian-American actress, like Ashley Park who played Gretchen in *Mean Girls.* Though Duke is not canonically a minority, casting Lee in the part emphasizes the differences between her and her cohort. Like Gretchen, Duke is the only Asian American within her popular clique, setting her apart physically from the two blonde girls who she travels with. Also like Gretchen, Duke is the most vulnerable and insecure of her friends. Part of this insecurity stems from the fact that she physically looks different than her classmates.

Duke's insecurities are a defining part of her character. Murphy and O'Keefe describe her as "The whipped beta dog of the three Heathers. Deeply insecure" (6). Duke is constantly trying to please Chandler and do what she asks of her, because she is so deeply insecure and attempting to hold on to what little power she has. In addition to her eating disorder being an attempt to fit in physically, it is also a way to control her life where she has no other control. She knows that without Chandler she is nothing, so she does what Chandler tells her and attempts to find control over her life elsewhere.

Duke does what Chandler wants despite her ritual mistreatment of her. Chandler is shown abusing Duke several times in the musical while she is still alive. During “Beautiful” she tells her that “Bulimia is so ’87,” condensing her very serious eating disorder to a fad. She also tells her “Shut up, Heather” multiple times on several occasions, most notably during “Candy Store.” Duke attempts to sing a solo and ad lib, grasping at any moment of attention or power she can, but is cut off by Chandler when she tells her to shut up and takes over the singing. Duke puts up with all the abuse from Chandler because she is a loyal Sidekick and knows that being with Chandler gives her power. Wiseman explains, “The Sidekick has power over other girls she wouldn’t have without the Queen Bee. She has a close friend who makes her feel popular and included” (91). Without the power that popularity brings her, Duke would have nothing, so she clings to her relationship with Chandler, no matter how poorly she is treated.

Putting up with this poor treatment, Duke is a faithful Sidekick until Chandler dies. When she sees her opening, Duke is quick to attempt to take over as Queen Bee. She wastes no time going through Chandler’s things and takes that all important red scrunchie from her locker, crowning herself the new Queen Bee. Duke becomes meaner than before, as if the soul of Chandler is possessing her through the scrunchie. Duke even claims that it is up to her to “replace” Heather Chandler (Murphy and O’Keefe 76). Once in her new role, Duke aids in spreading the rumor that Veronica had a threesome with Kurt and Ram, encourages Heather McNamara to kill herself, and even repeats the infamous “pulling on my dick” line (Murphy and O’Keefe 114). As Veronica stated earlier, Duke has no discernable personality, as she has no identity of her own. She is simply emulating Chandler, believing that this is what she must do in order to be popular and maintain the power that she has. Being popular means to conform, and to conform means to lose individual identity. Duke has conformed for so long that she no longer

has her own individual identity but only knows how to exist as these Girl World stereotypes such as The Sidekick or The Queen Bee. Duke is also unwilling to give up these identities as they are all she knows.

Duke only gives up her power and forged identity as the Queen Bee when Veronica literally strips her of it by taking the scrunchie out of her hair and putting it in her own. She does not graciously hand down the crown, but has it stolen from her. She is not exactly redeemed by the end of the musical, as she never goes through any type of death that the other characters do, and she never expresses regret over her actions or a desire to change. Her "redemption" only comes in the form of stage directions, as at the end of the show she refuses to sing the "Seventeen" reprise with her classmates until "A chastened Duke joins the chorus of students, and is mostly forgiven by them" (Murphy and O'Keefe 129). Duke is never given any autonomy or personal identity, conforming once again with those around her by joining in on their chorus. She no longer has the power that she craves, so her next best option is to conform with the laymen. Had she not joined in, she would be an outcast, which to the high school student is a fate worse than death. She ends partially redeemed by agreeing to "Make [the school] beautiful." However, this does not seem to be out of a true desire to make change, but of a desire to fit in.

Heather McNamara: You Don't Deserve to Dream

Unlike Heather Duke, Heather McNamara is able to be fully redeemed because she goes through a death of her own. McNamara is first described by Veronica in "Beautiful" as being "head cheerleader" and by stating that "her dad is loaded." That does not reveal much about who McNamara is, aside from the fact that she is wealthy like her fellow Heathers, and that she is a

cheerleader, which is a trope often associated with popularity. Murphy and O'Keefe describe McNamara as "Beautiful, innocent, stupid" and that she is "quite vulnerable and fearful" (6). This makes her similar to Karen in *Mean Girls,* who serves as the dumb, innocent character who is mostly just popular by proxy. McNamara is wealthy, pretty, and shares a name with the mythic bitch, so popularity is something that just came naturally to her. Unlike Duke and Chandler, McNamara never appears to be mean for the sake of being mean. She is only mean under the influence of Chandler or Duke. She is a follower most of the time, because she does not know any other way to be. Not until the school assembly organized by Mrs. Fleming does McNamara show her individuality and vulnerability, speaking of her own accord without the influence or pressure of Duke or Chandler.

McNamara speaks out at the assembly, stating that she thought about killing herself and then singing the song "Lifeboat." This song serves as an analogy for McNamara's feelings about being in high school and being popular, with her singing "I float in a boat in a raging black ocean, low in the water with nowhere to go. The tiniest lifeboat with people I know." She continues "If I say the wrong thing or I wear the wrong outfit, they'll throw me right over the side." This song reveals McNamara's deep insecurities and fears about being a part of the in-group. She does not feel power in the same way her peers do, but she knows that she must conform to the ideals of femininity regarding what she wears and what she says. She is constantly feeling claustrophobic, trapped on this lifeboat, with the fear of being kicked out of the group for doing something wrong. It is very likely that she has not revealed her true personality up to this point because she is afraid that if she is truly herself, she will be kicked out of the lifeboat, and if she gets kicked out, she will die. She has nowhere else to go, because in this Girl World, if you are not popular, you are nothing.

The only way that McNamara is able to explain these fears is through her lifeboat analogy. Wiseman explores this concept of lifeboats representing cliques, explaining it as starting out on a cruise ship, but girls start saying that the ship is stupid and encourage everyone to get on a life raft. They are leaving safety and entering treacherous waters where the girls must bond in order to survive (99-100). Once on these life rafts, girls feel trapped and cannot do anything but bond and conform to stay alive, which is the feeling that McNamara reveals as feeling during this song.

Ironically, by revealing these feelings in a public forum, McNamara is kicked out of the lifeboat by Duke (albeit as a fantasy) who encourages McNamara to go kill herself. In the bathroom, McNamara struggles with a pill bottle, attempting to swallow all the pills and kill herself. Veronica arrives, knocking the pills out of her mouth and saving her life. This is McNamara's death and rebirth. She was attempting to emulate those before her (Chandler, Kurt and Ram) by killing herself, seeing conformity as something she must do. The fate here may be death, but at least she is dying along with those in her lifeboat. It is not until McNamara is reborn with the help of Veronica that she is able to break free of the constraints set for her by the patriarchal notions of femininity. She stands up to Duke, and though hesitant, she stands with Veronica during the finale. It has taken her some time but she able to be an individual and leave the lifeboat behind.

Conclusion

In *Heathers the Musical,* being popular can mean either life or death. But to die often means to be redeemed. In this world, the stakes are high in the battle for power. Veronica,

Heather Chandler, Heather Duke, and Heather McNamara are all battling for power. They are playing a Game of Scrunchies, vying for power and survival. To be powerful at Westerberg means to be popular and to be popular means to be a Heather. Being a Heather is the ultimate goal for Veronica, who has no power at the beginning of the musical, as she is at the bottom of the social hierarchy. An idea discussed in the previous chapter that can also be seen here is that teenage girls have no other way of gaining power in a world where both their age and their gender are seen as inferior. Landry and Lipkin both make this point in their works, that because of this inferiority, teen girls must vie for power the only way they know how to, which is by being popular.

On the outset, popularity seems like an appealing prospect. However, once in the throes of it, Veronica realizes that she isn't happy. Veronica is only able to be happy in the end, after she kills the final living named male character. J.D.'s death serves as a metaphor for killing the patriarchal control that has once been governing Veronica and telling her what to do. It is smashed to smithereens, and though there is still a Queen Bee with Veronica wearing the red scrunchie, her power no longer lies in her ability to be a Heather. She does not have to be rich or fashionable or only associate with certain people for her to feel powerful. She has literally just destroyed the patriarchy and is able to become a powerful individual. Her power is ultimately found in her ability to form her own identity, an identity which is forged through death and rebirth, and which exists outside of the constraints set by society.

Heather McNamara is also able to find power by the end of the musical, as she has been reborn and able to literally break forward from the pack and speak for herself. Without the constant enforcement of the rules of Heather-dom by Chandler or Duke, McNamara is able to start exploring her own identity, instead of feeling like she must always conform in order to

survive. She knows that is she is kicked off the lifeboat, she will be able to swim. Though Heather Duke is partially reformed in the end, she never has a real rebirth, leaving her only "mostly forgiven." She never embraces her own individuality, forging her identity as a metaphorical Heather until the last few moments of the show. She never truly breaks free from patriarchal influence or goes through a rebirth. And finally, Heather Chandler, the almighty, is not so almighty in the end. She is given the opportunity for redemption, but even in death she continues her path of bullying, meanness, and search for power in being popular. She never learns to stop fighting for attention and power. She never learns how to stop being a Heather. Her desire to be powerful and popular remain in death, and she is never able to shake the ideas of who and what she should be, and the consequence of this is eternal damnation.

Not everyone will be able to change, as Veronica says at the end of the musical, "I can't promise no more Heathers." There will always be Heathers. But where there are Heathers, there are Veronicas, reminding people that it's beautiful to just be seventeen. In the next chapter, these extremes of popularity meaning either life or death will be explored and shown how they can be taken even further through the use of genre.

CHAPTER IV: BLOOD RAGE: PATRIARCHAL REPRESSION AND FEMININITIES WITHIN *CARRIE: THE MUSICAL*

Introduction

There is nothing scarier than a teenage girl. This is especially true when that teenage girl also has telekinetic powers and holds the ability to burn down her school. This is what makes Carrie White, the titular character in *Carrie: The Musical,* so scary. She is full of angst and a budding sexuality while also possessing the powers of a young witch. Originally written by Stephen King in 1974, *Carrie* was turned into a film in 1976, directed by Brian De Palma. The story of *Carrie* earned both King and De Palma critical appraisal and became a well-known tale. In 1981, Lawrence D. Cohen, Dean Pitchford and Michael Gore began working on a musical adaptation about this teenage social outcast turned mass murderer. Cohen cited the relationship of the mother and daughter along with the high school setting as what inspired him to turn it into a musical ("*Carrie: The Musical*-Singing Carrie"). *Carrie: The Musical* opened in 1988 on Broadway and closed after five performances, going down as one of the biggest flops in Broadway history. Cohen, Pitchford, and Gore still had faith in their show however, and reworked it in 2012 for a modern-day revival off-Broadway. Though not the most critically celebrated musical of all time, it did considerably better than its predecessor and spawned an official cast album, licensing rights, and a large fan base, three things that the original iteration failed to do.

Carrie: The Musical follows the story of Carrie White, an awkward teenage girl who is bullied by her classmates in the suburb of Chamberlain, Maine. Carrie lives with her mother Margaret, a religious fanatic who shelters Carrie from her own sexuality and abuses her both

mentally and physically. One day at school, Carrie gets her period for the first time, prompting her to react in fear, as she does not know what menstruation is. This is also the onset of her dormant telekinetic powers, which she discovers when she explodes a lightbulb in the locker room using just her mind. Carrie's ignorance about her own body is cause for bullying, and the other girls in the locker room start throwing tampons and sanitary pads at her. The gym teacher, Miss Gardner, breaks this up and bans all the girls involved in the bullying from attending the prom unless they apologize to Carrie. Mean girl Chris Hargensen refuses to apologize, getting her kicked out of the prom, whereas Sue Snell, another girl who was bullying Carrie, regrets her actions and wishes to make things right. Sue gets her boyfriend Tommy Ross to take Carrie to the prom, where Carrie is crowned prom queen. Once on stage accepting her award, Carrie is humiliated when Chris drops a bucket of pig's blood on her. Carrie imagines everyone making fun of her, which sends her into a blind rage in which her powers are unleashed. This results in her catching the school on fire, killing everyone inside. She then destroys the town on her way home. Once home, Carrie is fatally stabbed by Margaret, who believes that Carrie is a witch and that it is her job to stop the evil. In retaliation, Carrie stops her mother's heart from beating. Sue discovers Carrie's body and holds her as she dies.

The setting of a high school, which Cohen described as being an important element in adapting this story into a musical, is the main identifier of the characters, similar to *Mean Girls* and *Heathers*. This show does not exist outside of the hierarchy of power that exists within the high school system, a hierarchy which states that the most feminine and most popular girls also have the most power. This is an argument Nicole E. R. Landry makes, who argues that because girls in high school are given so little autonomy and control over the lives, the only thing that they can control is their ability to perform femininity. It is their means of negotiation when they

have no other real power. This idea has already been seen in both *Mean Girls* and *Heathers.* While femininity is a cultural construct constructed by a patriarchal society, the girls still buy into these ideas of who they are supposed to be, because it is something that they can control.

Rosalind Wiseman gives a definition for what femininity means in Girl World: "You have a great body, guys like you, you're not a prude but you're not a slut, you're in control, you're not uptight, and you're smart enough to get people to do what you want-preferably without them noticing" (272). This definition of femininity can be seen in the characters of Regina George and Heather Chandler, and as outlined later in this chapter, in Chris Hargensen. While the three musicals in this study take place in different states, the high school setting is a uniting factor that shows the far-reaching effects of patriarchal constructions of femininity. This desire to be ideally feminine encourages conformity, by urging these teenage girls to perform the same way in order to fulfill these ideals. Subsequently, the only way to survive the high school is by breaking free from what is expected. In previous chapters, both Cady and Veronica were shown as being able to break free from societal pressures and survive their cliques. This idea of survival is taken even further in *Carrie,* with the result of conformity and popularity being death, with no chance for resurrection. Unlike *Mean Girls* and *Heathers, Carrie* does not end with a hopeful message about the futures of these students, but with the message that conformity is death. Sue is the only character at the end of the musical to live because of her willingness to not fit in and to not to buy into the feminine role that is typically expected of her.

Carrie White: The Color of Flame

Carrie White is a character who does not exactly know what it means to be feminine. Because of her strict upbringing by her mother, Carrie has not experienced culture the same way that her classmates have. Wiseman explains, "Girls absorb the cultural messages of what a girl should wear and own, and how she should conduct herself, and they take that information and develop strict social hierarchies based on it" (12). Carrie finds herself at the bottom of the pyramid because she has not been exposed to the same cultural messages that other girls her age have, and so she is not able to understand what the "proper" way to act is. Carrie does not conduct herself in a way that is deemed acceptable in Girl World, and she becomes an outcast, the most feared thing in the conforming world of the suburban high school.

Carrie makes it clear from the outset that the characters in this musical desire conformity, by opening the musical with the number "In." In this song, the characters profess their fears about standing out and how they would "rather be shot" than not belong to the in-crowd. They state "Life just doesn't begin until you're in." This is the world in which Carrie lives, and which she does not understand, making her that all-feared outcast.

Carrie's inability to conform within her society is what pushes her to the bottom of the hierarchy amongst her peers, and this is further exacerbated when Carrie gets her period for the first time, unaware of what is happening. She emerges from the locker room after gym class with blood running down her leg, screaming, afraid that this means it is the end of her life. Instead of showing any empathy for Carrie, the other girls bully her for it. In "We Found the Witch, May We Burn Her?" Victoria Madden writes, "...in order to punish Carrie for flagrant disregard for social and physical propriety, the girls pelt her with tampons while chanting 'Plug it *up.* plug it

up.'" (14). Since Carrie has been forthright about her menstrual cycle, something that is still considered taboo even today, she must be punished for it. Menstrual blood is not something to be talked about, let alone shown, openly.

The girls' punishment of Carrie for bleeding has its roots in the patriarchal society that these girls live in, which tells them that though natural, menstruation is dirty, gross, and must be hidden. Laura Fingerson is interested in this topic of adolescent menstruation in *Girls in Power: Gender, Body, and Menstruation in Adolescence.* Fingerson explains how many girls feel embarrassed when they get their period and, "Concealing menstruation is a masculinist-based notion of the body because, for women, menstruating *is* ordinary...the dominant view of what the body is and how it should act and look is that of the male body" (15-6). Carrie showing her blood in public is a reminder to her classmates of their society's hatred of their gender, a hatred that they unconsciously take part in. Even though every single one of these girls has experienced or will experience menarche, they are still conditioned to hate this part of their anatomy because it is something that only happens to women.

Carrie is not aware of this hatred towards menarche because Carrie is not even aware that it exists up to this point. Margaret has refrained from telling Carrie about what menstruation is because Margaret sees it as a sin. In "And Eve Was Weak," Margaret tells Carrie that menstruation is "the curse of blood," a curse God placed upon women because of the Biblical Eve's lust and original sin. Margaret believes that women are innately evil and raises Carrie in ignorance about her body and its functions because she wants Carrie to be as pure as possible. Margaret's repression of Carrie has helped to shape Carrie's identity as a teenager. She has not been exposed to the same culture as her classmates, having been raised in virtual seclusion because of her mothers' religious beliefs and having been sheltered about her own gender and

body. Carrie's identity is primarily shaped by her mother's influence and Carrie is striving to be the person that her mother wants her to be. But now that Carrie has obtained the curse of blood, Margaret sees Carrie as wicked. This bullying of Carrie by both her mother and her classmates helps to shape her identity and the way that she sees herself within the school. She is only able to start forming her own identity when she starts her period, because this is when she gets her power.

With Carrie's blood comes her power. Literally in the case of Carrie, her telekinetic powers arrive along with menstruation. Madden explains that because Carrie gets her powers with her period, "Carrie's powers are thus inextricably bound to the most quintessentially abject dimension of her femaleness" (15). Carrie's supernatural powers do not exist without that which makes her abject. Carrie's powers then become a metaphor for men's fears of women and their bodies.

While explaining the taboos that exist with menstruation, Fingerson explains a taboo from the 1800s in which men believed, "...during menstruation, women have an enhanced psychic influence over themselves and their surroundings...Menstrual blood was feared as it was believed to be contaminating, yet magical at the same time" (43). Men have always feared menstruation and the possible power that comes with its arrival, and in *Carrie: The Musical*, these fears are realized. Douglas Keesey explains this idea when he writes, "Carrie turns a male society's stereotypes against itself and wreaks a terrible revenge on behalf of her mother and sisters in oppression" (37). Carrie has become the reality of a patriarchal society's fears, by gaining "psychic influence" over everything around her, a magical power which only arrives with the onset of her vaginal blood.

Over the course of the story, Carrie's magical powers grow. The first solo song that Carrie sings is "Carrie," which outlines how powerless she feels at the beginning of the musical. Carrie sings about how miserable she is with all the teasing that she suffers at the hands of her classmates, even though she does her best to fit in. Her peers will not let her conform no matter how hard she tries, both because she does not fully understand their culture and because she is the scapegoat for their own fears of standing out. As Edward J. Ingebretsen puts it, Carrie "embodies social self-hate" (20). By seeing Carrie as a token who represents their self-hate, Carrie's classmates see no problem with picking on her, because at least it is not them.

In "Carrie," Carrie expresses the contrasting ideas of both wanting to punish her peers by bringing them "down to their knees" while also craving their attention. Carrie wants to fit in amongst her peers, no matter how much they have bullied her, but she also still wants to punish them the way that they have punished her. "Carrie" also explores the importance of names in this musical, when Carrie sings about how she hopes that "Someday, someone will know my name." Carrie may wish to conform but she also wants people to call her by her name instead of the nicknames they call her, like "Scary White," "dumb bitch," and "spastic." For Carrie, the goal is not to be popular or well known, but for others to recognize her as simply "Carrie" and not bully her. With femininity comes popularity and with popularity comes power, but Carrie never expresses the desire to have power. Her power then does not come through Girl World femininity, but rather just her biological feminine functions, namely, her period.

Though Carrie's feminine qualities are what give her her power, she still does not conform to the typical rules of femininity within her school. To be able to coexist with her peers, and be more accepted by them, she must be more feminine. These feminine ideals are thrust upon Carrie by people around her, especially by her gym teacher Miss Gardner. In the song

"Unsuspecting Hearts," Miss Gardner encourages Carrie to change her appearance in order to be prettier for a potential male love interest. She tells Carrie that she's beautiful and that with "the right shade of lipstick and with the perfect dress, Carrie, it could be wonderful." Miss Gardner may be trying to be encouraging to Carrie and attempting to make her feel better, but in doing so, she is buying into the patriarchal ideals that a woman's self-worth is tied into whether she can find a man to love her, and that she must change her appearance and be more feminine in order to win this man over. Miss Gardner is not telling Carrie that she is fine and beautiful how she is, she is telling her that if she were to put some makeup on and wear a pretty dress, that she would be able to attract a man. She is not building Carrie up as an independent woman who should celebrate who she is but telling her that she needs to change her appearance in order to please others. Miss Gardner's heart and intentions may be in the right place, but in telling Carrie that she must change her appearance in order to appeal to a man and to fit in, Miss Gardner is doing more harm than good. Carrie is already self-conscious about not fitting in. Miss Gardner is in a position of authority; encouraging Carrie to change herself instead of celebrating who she is leaves an impression on Carrie. This that tells her that she is unworthy of love unless she changes, and that her value as a woman is intrinsically tied to her ability to find a romantic partner.

This potential romantic partner appears to Carrie in the form of Tommy Ross, a popular jock. When he asks Carrie to the prom, though she is hesitant at first, she does agree to go with him and for once feels like this is her chance to fit in. Because she is told that in order to fit in, she must conform and be feminine like the rest of her classmates, she makes her own dress, and does her makeup. In "A Night We'll Never Forget," as the students are all singing about their anticipation for prom night, Carrie sings about her worries when it comes to doing her makeup.

She sings “I bet other girls already know, the ways to get their skin to glow, but I can learn. I’m not sure how all these colors mix, those other girls, they’ve got their tricks, but I can learn. It’s my turn.” Carrie believes that it is finally her chance to fit in and be like all the other girls at her school, something that she has not been able to be before. She is embracing her feminine side, by attempting to make her skin “glow” and add more colors to her face. Her ability to conform with the girls at her school is measured by her ability to be someone else and change her appearance. The prom, that all important American ritual, is the place where Carrie can show off her new look.

Amy L. Best explains, “Again and again, girls are told that going to the prom is central to their being and becoming feminine” (195-6). If Carrie is able to attend the prom and show off her glowing skin to the other girls there, she will show others that she is capable of presenting herself as acceptably feminine and prove that she is able to be just like everyone else at their school. Neither Carrie nor any of the other characters in *Carrie: The Musical* are celebrated for their individuality. In the high school, it is considered a boon to be able to conform, and to be an individual means to be deviant. This is the reason that Chris Hargensen hates Carrie so much, because she does not fit in the way that she is expected to.

Chris Hargensen: You Get Nowhere Being Nice

Chris is what Wiseman would categorize as the Queen Bee, having power over everyone. When it comes to being her friend, “You’re on her side or else--you are with her or against her” (87-8). Chris sees her peers as either her allies or enemies, there is no in-between. This means that Carrie is her enemy. Carrie is at the bottom of the pyramid in the high school’s caste system

while Chris is at the very top. Chris maintains this power over the other girls and boys in the school by being mean, and she does not appreciate when people try to question her authority.

Chris has her own philosophy about the way the world works, which she outlines in the song "The World According to Chris." She explains "My daddy taught me you get nowhere being nice, so now I'm sharing his advice. The world according to Chris is better to strike than get struck, better to screw than get screwed. You probably think it's bizarre, but that's the way things are." Through this song, Chris reveals that she believes that the natural order of things is that some people are on top and some people are on the bottom, and it is the job of those at the top to keep the others at the bottom. This is done by being mean, "screwing" people, and otherwise doing what one can to make sure one stays in power and that the marginalized stay marginalized. Chris believes that this is just the way that things are, and there is no need to change them or be nice because this is the natural order of things. In the song, she also reveals that it is her father who taught her this philosophy. Chris' worldview has been shaped by a man, and this patriarchal worldview is what gets Chris killed in the end.

Another factor that leads to Chris' death is the way that she treats Carrie. Chris is the instigator in acts of bullying Carrie. Since Chris is the Queen Bee and has so much control over other people, they willingly follow what she does and says. Chris sets the rules for what is acceptable and what is not, which is why the other girls take part in the bullying of Carrie when she gets her period. Chris is seen manipulating many people around her to maintain her power, and one of these people is her boyfriend, Billy Nolan. When Carrie gets invited to the prom by Tommy, Chris sees this as a threat to the equilibrium of the power structure in the high school and hatches her plan to enact revenge on Carrie. To do this, she enlists the help of Billy.

In the song “Do Me a Favor” Chris uses her sexuality as a means to manipulate Billy into helping her. Just like Regina George and Heather Chandler, Chis is aware of how her sexuality can be used as a tool to get what she wants from boys. Amid a sexual encounter with Billy, she tells him that she’s “not in the mood” and then tells Billy “You gotta help me, I can even out this debt. And we could both give Carrie White a night she won’t forget.” Chris knows that she has power over Billy and can get him to help her, especially when he is aroused. Billy confirms this when he tells her “You’re pissed off, that’s so hot. I like you this way. Whatever your game is girl, I’m ready to play.” Chris is using her sexuality to get Billy to go along with what she wants, and he buys into it because he finds her rage “hot.” It does not matter what Chris wants him to do, because he is willing to do anything she asks of him. Billy is also in the power of Chris because he is not nearly as popular as her. Everyone tolerates Billy because of his relationship with Chris, and Chris likes having him around because she is able to bend him to her will. Chris is used to getting what she wants, and part of the reason she is so angry about getting kicked out of the prom is because she is not able to manipulate herself back in.

Instead of owning up to her actions in bullying Carrie, Chris instead blames Carrie for her getting kicked out of prom and plans to exact revenge against her. As Chris has already outlined in “The World According to Chris,” she believes that there is an order to the world that must be maintained and that it is “better to whip than get whipped, even if somebody bleeds.” When others do not maintain that order, Chris takes it upon herself to even things out. In “A Night We’ll Never Forget,” she explains her revenge against Carrie when she sings “I believe in getting even, that’s what I believe. And I just don’t forgive and forget. I don’t turn the other cheek for some pathetic freak. Carrie White’s got a lot to regret.” Chris is not going to let this injustice she sees against herself slide. She believes that Carrie must be punished, “whipped,” for

inadvertently getting her kicked out of prom, though this is due to Chris' own pride and unwillingness to apologize to Carrie for bullying her.

Wiseman explains "…those in positions of power are often blind to behavior or justify it so they won't have to take responsibility for their actions" (85). Chris does not see her actions as wrong. She justifies her bullying of Carrie by telling herself that this is just the way that things are, and that there is nothing anyone can do about that. Also, like Heather Chandler, Chris uses meanness and manipulation as a way to maintain her popularity. She is going to continue being mean to Carrie because she thinks that this is the order of things, and that it is her job to maintain the order, as she has the most power. The idea that Chris is never wrong because there is a certain order in life, was learned from her father. The men in a patriarchal society often get away with more than the women, though up until now, Chris has always been able to get what she wants. Because she is finally being held responsible for her actions by getting banned from prom instead of getting what she wants as usual, Chris decides that Carrie, the resident scapegoat, is the one to blame and decides to dump pig's blood on her.

Chris never explicitly states why she chooses to publicly humiliate Carrie by dropping pig's blood on her head at prom, but it is a clear reference to Carrie's previous impropriety in flaunting her period. Chris plans on publicly shaming Carrie by reminding their classmates that Carrie is a woman who bleeds, someone who is dirty and abject, someone who does not belong standing on stage as the prom queen. Though Chris herself is a woman who bleeds, she is taught to be ashamed of this within her patriarchal society and does not flaunt her womanhood as callously as Carrie has. The reason why Chris chooses pig's blood specifically is unclear, though Barbara Creed explains that pigs are often associated with women, and that in some cultures, the word "pig" is used as slang for vagina (80). Chris' attack on Carrie is a clear attack on her

femininity and gender. Chris could have chosen anything to dump on Carrie's head, but blood is chosen specifically to mock Carrie's menstrual blood. A pig is also chosen purposefully, to show the world that Carrie is dirty like a sow. It also emphasizes Chris' sadistic nature, as she and Billy kill the pig themselves, the two of them singing in "A Night We'll Never Forget:" "Old man Henty had a farm, and on that farm we killed a pig" before breaking out in orgasmic sounding "ohs." Chris and Billy get a thrill out of this killing and shaming of Carrie. Unfortunately for Chris (and everyone else at prom for that matter), dropping blood on Carrie was a mistake, as blood has been the very thing to give Carrie her power.

Chris' desire for power and control is what gets her killed in the end when she fuels Carrie's rage and power. The Queen Bee tends to be mean, and the consequences of that meanness can vary. Chris has vied for power in her school by being a bully, making sure that those that she believes belong at the bottom stay at the bottom. She is the one who enforces the strict social hierarchies at their high school, because it is the only way that she finds capital. Her father has always taught her that she must abuse others to maintain her position of power, and that coupled with the societal pressure to be popular are what gets Chris where she is at the end of the musical. Had the Western patriarchal society not instilled these ideas in Chris, then she would not have felt the need to publicly humiliate Carrie to prove that she was the more powerful one at the school. Chris is not willing to let go of any of the power that she has, and the only solution she sees to showing everyone this is to take Carrie down in front of them. Chris is a master manipulator, a mean girl, and a Queen Bee whose desire for status gets her murdered.

Sue Snell: What Does it Cost to be Kind

The only person who is able to survive the school massacre is Sue Snell, Chris' best friend and Tommy's girlfriend. Sue decides to take a stand against the ritual mistreatment of Carrie by convincing Tommy to take Carrie to prom and by showing Carrie some kindness. This is what ultimately saves her life. Sue starts just like all the other girls in her school, bullying Carrie and going along with it because that is simply what everyone else is doing. Sue even explains to Tommy in "The World According to Chris" that while she was bullying Carrie, "What came over me was something new. I did things I'd never done before. And now I wish there was something I could do or say. I've never ever felt this way." Sue regrets her decisions and her role in bullying Carrie, as she was just swept up in conforming to those around her. Sue has only bullied Carrie because it is what was expected of her to conform and fit in amongst her peers.

When she starts regretting the part she played in hurting Carrie and attempts to set things right, Sue inadvertently makes herself an outcast, just like Carrie. Madden explains "Sue's audacity to openly refute social norms thus singles her out as yet another threat to stability" (18). Sue becomes a threat to the social order just like Carrie, because anyone who refuses to conform threatens equilibrium within the society. Sue not only stands up for Carrie and attempts to apologize to her, but she also gives up her role at prom, one of the most American rites of passage. This act of selflessness sets Sue apart from those around her by making her an individual instead of just one of the crowd.

Before Sue becomes an outcast, she would have been considered what Wiseman refers to as a Sidekick, alongside Chris' Queen Bee. Wiseman explains when it comes to the Queen Bee

and the Sidekick, “The difference between the two is that if you separate the Sidekick from the Queen Bee, the Sidekick can alter her behavior for the better, while the Queen Bee would be more likely to find another Sidekick and begin again” (90). As the Sidekick, Sue was quick to bully Carrie along with Chris but when she starts to feel guilty about it, she attempts to reform herself and make up for her past actions. When Sue shows kindness toward Carrie, Chris rejects her. Sue is no longer “in” because she has refused to be mean to Carrie along with everyone else, challenging Chris’ authority by refusing to bend to her will.

Because Sue can change her ways and become a nicer, better person, her life is spared. It is not conformity that allows her to exist but rather breaking away from the crowd and becoming her own person. She stops following the rules of femininity and hierarchy within the school, which though seen as the ultimate sin amongst her classmates, it is this individuality which keeps her living. In giving up her place within the hierarchy of the school and instead letting Carrie take her place, Sue has saved herself from Carrie’s wrath. Though both Miss Gardner and Tommy have also shown some kindness to Carrie, Sue is the only who actually sees Carrie and attempts to understand her.

Sue really sees Carrie when they have a confrontation after class. Before Sue hatches the plan to get Tommy to ask Carrie to prom, she first attempts to apologize to Carrie for the part she had in bullying her. When Carrie lashes out at Sue and does not believe she is being sincere, Sue sings the song “Once You See.” This song has many queer undertones and could easily be transformed into a heterosexual love song, typical of most American musicals. In this song, Sue sings “For years, you look, you look at someone passing by. And then one day you see her. One day you finally see her” and “She’s always been there. I, I never knew. I felt as though this girl revealed herself to me, and now I know that once you see, you can’t un-see.” Carrie’s anger

towards Sue has made Sue feel as if she finally sees Carrie as a person. While everyone else has seen Carrie as a punching bag and a scapegoat, Sue is able to actually see her as a real person with real feelings. Sue knows that she can never go back to treating Carrie poorly because Carrie has shown herself to her and made herself an individual. Once Sue is able to really see Carrie is when she comes up with the plan to have Tommy ask her to prom. Sue wanted to absolve her own guilt by apologizing, but after Carrie revealed her anger, Sue believes that Carrie deserves a good experience just like every other girl at school.

This plan causes Sue to ask Tommy to "Do Me a Favor." Sue explains to Tommy that "I'm so ashamed of how we've all been treating Carrie White. Now I realize this is hardly your concern. I hate to drag you into this, but I have nowhere else to turn." Because Sue has given up her place within the hierarchy by showing Carrie sympathy, she no longer has any power to make things right for Carrie. This is why she turns to Tommy, who still maintains his power within the social hierarchy. Because Tommy does not exist in Girl World, the rules are different for him, and he is able to do things that Sue can't because of the limits of her gender and position within the school. When Sue first asks Tommy to take Carrie to prom, he initially says no but gives in when he realizes how important it is to Sue. The consequences for taking someone unpopular to prom are far less serious for Tommy than they would be for Sue, because of his position as a male. Though some of his friends do tease him, he is never at risk of losing his power. Tommy shows kindness in bringing Carrie to the prom, and he does show her a good time, but his life is not spared during the destruction. This is possibly because unlike Sue, Tommy never really changes. He only shows kindness to Carrie to appease Sue, not because he truly believes that Carrie deserves to be treated like everyone else. It is also because Tommy's gender as a male is seen as a threat to Carrie, who has been taught by her mother that a man

never has good intentions. No matter what Tommy's intentions were, he never really sees Carrie the way that Sue has seen her.

Because Sue actually sees Carrie, her life is spared, as she escapes Carrie's wrath at the prom. Because Sue has escaped the destruction, she is there with Carrie when Carrie dies from the wound that her mother has inflicted on her when she stabbed her. As Carrie dies in Sue's arms at the end of the musical, during "Epilogue," Sue sings a reprise of "You Shine," a duet she has previously sung with Tommy. This re-emphasizes the queer undertones of these two females' relationship. Though Carrie has killed all her friends, Sue still holds her when she dies because she can still see the weak and helpless girl who is underneath the witch. Sue's kindness and purity of heart allow her to show this last bit of humanity to Carrie.

Throughout the course of the show, Sue reveals herself as the one who is able to exist outside the rules of femininity set forth by their patriarchal society and enforced by Chis. Sue gives up her femininity and thus her power in order to give Carrie a good night at prom. She gives up her boyfriend, her chance to dress up and engage in the ritual of prom, and she gives up her popularity. All of the capital that Sue has once had has been traded in for the opportunity to be kind and allow another girl to see, at least for one night, what it is like to have power. Sue has been able to break free from the conformity and prove herself as an individual, sparing her life in the process.

Conclusion

Carrie's death is ultimately caused by the patriarchal society that she lives in. Though it is literally at the hands of her mother that Carrie dies, the events surrounding this phallic stabbing

are the true reason for her death. Margaret's hatred of women, taught to her by a patriarchal society, which has caused her to repress Carrie and her sexuality, is the catalyst for Carrie's actions. This, doubled with the constant bullying by her peers for not fitting in and not being feminine enough, are the reasons that Carrie is pushed into killing everyone but Sue. All the people who die are products of the patriarchal society which has shaped Carrie to be the monster that she becomes. Miss Gardner, though she attempts to show some kindness, goes about it by telling Carrie that she could fit in better if she were prettier and if she could get a boy to like her. Nobody teaches Carrie that she is valuable as a person on her own, only that she could be valuable were she to change things about herself. Tommy is kind to her by bringing her to prom, however, being male, he is a part of the patriarchal system which has repressed Carrie her whole life. Chris is the instigator, the one who dropped the blood on Carrie's head, a punishment which was decided upon because it was a reminder of Carrie's menarche. Chris' shame of her own natural bodily functions and gender caused her to bully Carrie, which gets her killed. The other ensemble characters who do not have a lot of character development die because by taking part in the bullying of Carrie, they are buying into the ideas of what is right and what is wrong within their society.

Carrie is not the villain in this story. She may be the monster, but she is not the villain. The real villain in all of this is the patriarchal suburban society that these characters live in. Everyone is a victim to what society expects of them, especially within the high school, where these young people are still trying to figure out who they are and where they exist in the world. They bully Carrie and others because it is all they know how to do to fit in. But it is only fighting against the patriarchy that can keep them alive. Sue is able to live in the end because she does not conform to what everyone wants her to be and she can actually see Carrie for what she is: a

human, regardless of her gender or her social standing. Carrie is a real person with feelings and emotions, and respecting that instead of trying to maintain status within the high school is what keeps Sue living. Just like Veronica, Sue is able to gain outside perspective of their high school world and barely escape death because of it. Though not having the same threat of death, Cady also finds her own individuality once she learns that conforming gets her nowhere, and to shine she must step out of patriarchal expectations. Sue, Veronica, and Cady fight what is expected of them and challenge the roles that society has always told them that they must conform to. Patriarchy is evil, not Carrie, Chris, Regina, or Heather.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The teen girl musical is a genre which will most likely persist. I hope there will always be musicals about teenagers on Broadway, off-Broadway, and off-off-Broadway for as long as there is musical theatre. If the success of *Mean Girls, Heathers the Musical,* and *Carrie: The Musical* tells us anything, it is that people are interested this genre and will keep coming back to it. This is also evident in the recent opening of *Clueless, the Musical,* and upcoming productions such as *13 Going on 30.* Since these musicals are not going away any time soon, it is time to start changing the way we talk about them. It is easy to write these shows off as "vapid, teenybopper trash" as Rex Reed of *The Observer* wrote about *Mean Girls,* but upon closer examination, these shows have much deeper themes, such as what it means to be a teenage girl in the Western world, the consequences of bullying, and the effects of the patriarchy. These do not sound like vapid topics to me.

The lack of critical literature on these musicals indicates that many scholars fail to see the importance of stories concerning teenagers and teenage girls especially. The literature that does exist about these stories only focuses on the film and novel versions, not touching on the musical versions. In addition to teen girl stories not being taken seriously, musicals are often given the same treatment, not considered to be as serious as straight plays and therefore, not subject to the critical analysis that they deserve. Musicals offer a double characterization through the use of songs and lyrics, which allows for a deeper analysis of character than the straight play does. Teen girls are also deserving of this critical analysis. If Girl Studies shows us anything, it's that the history of girls in the United States is a complicated one that must be understood in order to better understand their stories and motivations. Teen girls are more deeply intellectually than

people often want to give them credit for, but there are many teenage activists and young voices which are leading the next generation of feminist activists.

All three of the musicals I discussed deal directly with the effects of the patriarchy on the world and life of the teenage girl. The patriarchy is what has created Girl World in the first place, by creating the ideals of femininity that young girls believe they must conform to. As men are the prominent gender in Western society, they set the rules for the ways in which people "should" act and behave. Girls learn these gender codes from a young age, and these ideas about how they are meant to act are socialized starting at birth. These gender codes determine which girls are the most feminine, based on how well these girls conform to these ideals. These ideals include being docile, subservient, and delicate. The girls who act this way, the "feminine" girls, then become the most popular girls in their schools, as their femininity is what gets them capital in the high school.

As seen in Nicole E.R. Landry's study, popularity is what determines how powerful a girl can be. Because girls are the secondary gender, they cannot find power in their society, especially as teenagers with even less power. Because of this, they try to find power wherever they can find it, which for teens, is in the high school. They then form social hierarchies based on who is the most popular and most powerful, and a cycle of power persists. This cycle brings the most popular and most feminine girls to the top of the hierarchy, and everyone else to the bottom, which then perpetuates the idea that girls must act a certain way. So, patriarchy determines the rules of femininity, the conforming to which determines popularity, which in turn determines power. The high school girl is only able to feel powerful when she is popular, which is also the reason she acts mean to other girls. She sees her maliciousness as a means to gain and maintain her popularity, which she sees as her only way of feeling powerful.

This is the mentality taken on by the Queen Bee, as defined by Rosalind Wiseman as "a combination of the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland and Barbie" (87). The Queen Bee is Barbie-perfect, beautiful, and has what all the other girls want, while still manipulating and forcing those around her to do what she wants. My first example of the Queen Bee was Regina George, who Tina Fey wrote into existence after reading Wiseman's book. Because of this, Regina holds many of the characteristics of the Queen Bee. Regina is seen manipulating her friends, bullying them, and partaking in relational aggression in order to get what she wants. She also uses her sexuality to manipulate her male classmates into doing her bidding. All these actions are as a result of the patriarchy, which sends gender coded images that tell Regina how she must be and act. This extends to her desire to be feminine, which I have already covered, but also her use of relational aggression. Part of being feminine means not being aggressive or fighting, meaning that girls learn how to fight covertly behind people's backs. Regina using her sexuality as a weapon is also a result of her society, which tells her that she is valued by what she is able to give men. Regina's role as the Queen Bee allows her the ability to control the social hierarchy and determine who falls where, which is where the other teen girl characters in *Mean Girls* come in.

Gretchen and Karen are Regina's Sidekicks who do what they are told because they know that standing up to the Queen Bee means certain death, i.e., loss of popularity and power. Gretchen is especially affected by this, not even having her own identity because she does exactly what Regina wants her to do. These girls do not seem to be truly happy, or have an identity of their own, but they go along with the Queen Bee to try to maintain any power that they have. Cady comes in, naïve to the ways of Girl World, but soon works her way into the popular clique, giving her more power than she has ever experienced before. Cady most go

through a journey of being popular and then losing all her power in order to realize the things that are really important to her. Her revelation is that being mean to other girls will never actually make her happy or feel powerful, and that being true to herself is the best thing that she can be. This is something that Janis has realized long ago, and she always expresses herself, despite what the consequences might be. Regina is only able to realize this after she survives death after getting hit by a bus. These teen girl characters all have the chance for redemption, and often that comes in the form of surviving death. Regina survives her own death, and only then is she able to see the error of her ways and learn to be a nice girl. For all of these characters, fighting against the patriarchal notions of what it means to be a girl is the thing that allows them to live in harmony together.

This can also be seen at the end of *Heathers the Musical,* when Veronica brings the school together by declaring that they are all beautiful in their own way and do not have to be anything but themselves. This is after going through her own journey and surviving her own death several times. The idea of redemption and resurrection is taken even further in *Heathers,* with death being a real consequence of being mean, however there is still a light tone throughout. The characters who die are never really given the chance for redemption like Regina was. Heather Chandler and the jocks Kurt and Ram do appear as ghosts to Veronica, but they continue to be bullies even in death. They are never able to learn the lesson that true power comes from being true to yourself and fighting the expectations set forth by the patriarchy. Even in death, Heather Chandler's influence can be seen on the other Heathers: Heather Duke and Heather McNamara, who still believe they must look and act a certain way in order to be accepted within the school. Heather Duke even wants to take over the role of Queen Bee, seeing this as her road to ultimate power.

Veronica must fight the literal patriarchy in the form of the male character J.D. and must destroy him so that the other students in her school are able to survive. Though J.D. is the one who ends up blowing himself up in the end, Veronica is the one who shoots him and convinces him that his actions are wrong. Veronica must risk both figurative social death and literal death in order to destroy J.D., who had the intent of killing the entire student body. J.D. can stand in for the patriarchy, as he is the one who ultimately kills Heather Chandler, with her meanness and bullying being the indirect reason for this death. He is also the temptation for Veronica, who changes herself to please him. And like the patriarchy, he must be destroyed before the students at the school are able to truly be themselves and find the beauty they all hold within. In this black comedy, fighting the patriarchy here is a bit more extreme than in *Mean Girls*, as it must literally be obliterated, but in the end the same message persists: Finding one's individual identity and not conforming to certain ideals is the most radical and beautiful thing that they can do.

Carrie: The Musical, on the other hand, functions a little bit differently than the other two musicals. It has the same character tropes and general messages but takes on a much darker tone, as it is a horror musical in addition to being a teen girl musical. These elements of horror take the themes even to even greater extremes. The musical, the teen girl story, and the horror story are all genres that take things to the extreme, so they function well together. In *Carrie*, like in *Heathers*, there are real consequences to bullying and being popular, those consequences being death and destruction, however there is no chance for resurrection and death is permanent. The dead characters do not reappear as ghosts in this story. Taking on the perspective of the bullied girl who only gets to exist at the top of the hierarchy for one night, the story of *Carrie* offers a slightly different perspective than *Heathers* and *Mean Girls*. Carrie functions similarly to the

characters of Cady and Veronica, but she does not save her school in the end, but rather destroys it.

Carrie belonging to the horror genre makes the content more serious than the previous two musicals discussed. There are real and scary elements at play her, with Carrie having supernatural powers. These powers arrive along with her maturing into being a woman, tying her power innately into the qualities which make her female. Carrie is the only one of these characters who does not need popularity in order to truly be powerful. However, her taste of popularity at the prom is what makes her feel good and feel special. This is when she is buying into the ideals of patriarchal femininity by attending prom and wearing a dress and makeup. It is at this prom where Carrie is humiliated and takes her revenge, killing everyone at the school.

One of the victims is Chris, who has a deeply patriarchal world view. Her ideas about the world have been taught to her by her father, making the world of a man the world which Chris is trying to enforce in her role as the Queen Bee. Chris never gets her chance for redemption. She never finds fault in her actions and dies in the school along with everyone else. The only person who survives the massacre in the school is Sue, who is not attending the prom, as she has given up her date so that he could go with Carrie.

Sue's selflessness and kindness to Carrie are what keep her alive. Sue is the only character who is able to break free from patriarchal constraints and be an individual, going against what Chris wants and no longer caring about fitting in or being popular. Doing what is right becomes the most important thing to Sue. In this, *Carrie* carries the same message as the other musicals, that the teen girl must be an individual and break free from her patriarchal constraints in order to be free and possibly be happy, but unfortunately for Sue, she is the only

character who realizes this. This makes her the only character to survive, and the ending of the musical is not quite as positive as that as that of the other two.

The extremity of the consequences for the girls who bully in *Mean Girls, Heathers,* and *Carrie* is determined by the genre of each musical. *Mean Girls* is a comedy, *Heathers* is a black comedy, and *Carrie* is horror. These genres determine the endings of these stories and affects the overall tone of each musical. All three toy with the concepts of death and resurrection for the popular girl, with the death becoming more literal and more horrific with each genre change. A comedy ends happily, as seen with both *Mean Girls* and *Heathers.* Though *Heathers* has horror elements, it still maintains a cheerful ending. *Carrie* offers some hope in the form of the survival of Sue, but the conclusion is much more bleak and serious. The horror genre makes the ultimate message of individuality and kindness seem more germane. *Mean Girls* and *Heathers* contain the same conclusion, but the comedy genre makes it seem less crucial.

Despite the differences in genre, there are several similarities between these three shows which is why I chose them specifically. The first thing that struck me was the similar character structure. All three of these musicals have a Queen Bee with Sidekicks, and a character who is attempting to infiltrate the popular group, whether out of personal reasons or by chance. Each Queen Bee goes through some sort of transformation, though for *Heathers* and *Carrie,* this transformation is death. This extreme consequence brings the anti-bullying theme to the forefront, a theme which is carried in all three musicals. Each musical has a character who goes from unpopular to popular throughout the course of the show, and she learns something from this experience. Again, Carrie's learned experience is slightly different than that of Cady and Veronica, but without the horror elements, it is the same general theme that being part of the in-crowd is not all that it is cracked up to be. All three musicals also feature jock characters, and

with the exceptions of Margaret and Miss Gardner in *Carrie*, minimal intervention by adult figures. These are shows that deal mainly with teenagers.

The songs featured in *Mean Girls, Heathers,* and *Carrie* also contain similar themes and patterns. "Where do You Belong?" in *Mean Girls,* "Beautiful" in *Heathers* and "In" in *Carrie* are all songs featured early on in the musical which deal with the roles of high school students. They all touch on the idea of conformity in the high school, and how this is not just considered what is normal, but what is a necessity. These songs set the scene for the conformity within the musicals, which as I have shown, comes from the patriarchal society determining the way in which these teens must act.

Each Queen Bee gets an anthem for who she is and how she sees the world; "Meet the Plastics" for Regina, "Candy Store" for Heather Chandler, and "The World According to Chris" for Chris. These songs all offer an insight to these characters that the non-musical versions do not allow, as the characters are voicing their opinions themselves. These songs allow for a glimpse inside the character instead of what other people say about them, which is the beauty of the musical format. This also allows characters who are considered to be "vapid" to have a bit more depth.

Each musical also ends with a song which serves as a call to action, "I See Stars" in *Mean Girls,* "Seventeen (Reprise)" in *Heathers,* and "Epilogue" in *Carrie.* These call to actions vary slightly, but hold the same general message. In "I See Stars" the message is that everyone is beautiful in their own right and people need to be kinder to each other, with Cady singing "It's me and you, not us and her." She is calling people to see themselves as "stars" who shine on their own and with a little kindness to each other, they will better be able to recognize that. In "Seventeen (Reprise)" Veronica declares that "We are done with acting evil" and insists that they

can all be beautiful when they start being kinder to each other. In “Epilogue,” Sue sings about truly seeing people as individuals and the ensemble sings “What does it cost to be kind?” While having slight differences, all three musicals end with the message that everyone is an individual who shines in their own way, and there is a call to action to be kinder to one another in order to fulfill this potential to shine.

Ultimately, these musicals share the same positive message of spreading kindness and celebrating individuality, which is why I thought these three musicals were useful in particular in analyzing patriarchal influence on teenage girls. The only way they are able to break through the cliques and fight what is expected of them is by truly being individuals. It is only when these girls realize that they do not need to be like everyone else to feel good about themselves that things actually start to change. In general, there is nothing wrong with cliques or belonging to a group. Being in a clique can lead to strong friendships and allow girls to form strong bonds with those who are similar to them. The problem arises when a teenage girl changes herself in order to fit in with clique. Conformity to the clique is the issue, not the clique in and of itself.

Though the influence of the patriarchy on fictional characters was analyzed, the greater implications of this study include the potential of this analysis being applied to real teenage girls. Teenage girls create a large fan base for these musicals, and often discuss them in online forums. This shows the importance of these musicals to teenage girls, who are able to see themselves in the characters, which adds to the musicals’ popularity. Their popularity is in part due to their relatability. The messages that the teenage audience comes away with are valuable ones that teach that kindness is more important than popularity, and that being an individual is something to be celebrated rather than condemned. Art has the power to create real change, and in seeing these musicals, teenage audience members have the ability to go back to their real lives with a

new perspective about their behavior. These musicals are a teaching tool for both adults and teenagers. To adults, they reveal that these are real things that teenage girls are going through and thus are worthy of serious consideration, and to teenagers, they teach that it is okay to be different and "raise your right finger" "to how girls should behave," as Janis says.

This message of fighting conformity is of course found in other teen girl musicals, but these three in particular show it clearly, and there is a lot of information about these three musicals. I mentioned some other options in the teen girl genre, including *Clueless, the Musical,* and *13 Going on 30.* These two musicals are also based on films, in which the lead female character learns that being an individual is more important than being popular. The main reason I am not using these two musicals however is that in the case of *Clueless,* it is too new for there to be any information available about it, and with *13 Going on 30,* it does not even exist yet, as it is still in development. I believe that once there is more information about these musicals in existence that they would both be able to be analyzed with Girl Studies and feminist theory, showing that the teen girls in these shows are directly influenced by the patriarchal world in which they live. Another musical that follows this template that I did not mention earlier is *Bring it On: The Musical.* This particular musical was not included in this study as I personally believe that it does not take teenage girls seriously in the same way the other musicals I analyzed do. However upon expanding this study, this is an element worthy of examination.

Several musicals exist within the teen musical genre that do not follow the girl characters as closely as the ones that I have mentioned. If I were to expand this study on patriarchal influence on the teenage girl in the musical, I would open this up to all teen musicals and analyze the girl characters within them the same way which I looked at characters in *Mean Girls, Heathers,* and, *Carrie*. Some of these musicals that would be worthy of analysis are the new

musicals *Be More Chill* and *Dear Evan Hansen,* along with some older musicals such as *13, West Side Story, Bare, High School Musical,* and possibly the most well-known teen musical of all time, *Grease,* among several other options. All of these musicals would serve as rich material in which the female characters could be analyzed and better understood within their patriarchal world, and how this world has an influence on their actions and motivations.

I would also extend my study to the boy characters and how they are also impacted by the patriarchy. There are several instances of toxic masculinity and negative patriarchal influence found throughout *Mean Girls, Heathers,* and *Carrie,* included but not limited to homophobia, aggression, and sexism. These actions and behaviors are also as a result of the patriarchy and have an influence on the way in which the girl characters act and react to the boy characters. The scope of this thesis is not broad enough to cover the male characters and discuss the implications of masculinity along with femininity. As a part of a broader project, this would be an angle that would be of interest. Using Boy Studies and feminist theory, the teen boy characters could be analyzed in the same way that the teen girl characters have been, looked at critically in an attempt to understand why they act the way that they do and what that means within the high school.

If liking *Mean Girls* makes someone "basic" or "vapid," then so what? The point of these musicals is to show that it is okay to be who you want to be and like what you like without the fear or worry of judgment. There is more to these musicals and the characters than meets the eye, and they are worthy of serious and critical evaluation instead of just being written off as "teenybopper trash." These musicals are identifying with a large part of the population and represent a worldview of that of the teenage girl. The perspective of teenage girls matter, and giving a platform for these stories helps in the fight against patriarchy. In addition to positive

representation, the teenage girl characters in these musicals, and in turn the teenage audience members, learn valuable lessons about what it means to be kind to other people and to have no fear in being who they truly are. These are lessons that some people never learn. There is nothing basic about wanting to be a better person. Both teen girls and musicals are worthy of critical analysis and should not be judged for what they appear to be on the outside, which is what these musicals are trying to teach. Beauty is more than skin deep, and it costs nothing to be kind.

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